



*aFRica*

saraba 13



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## Editor's Note

There is a statement, “Africa is a country” used to satirize ‘Western’ preconceptions about Africa. With billions of people, thousands of ethnicities, several colonial histories and varied post-independence struggles, the continent is spoken of as a single plane that is beset by bad leadership, unending poverty, and the odd scenery. Yes, the continent has these, and yes, there really are some similarities across the different countries and cultures. But, the question remains: Is that all that can be said? And there is another question: How can you represent what truly is Africa?

For us at Saraba, we set out to have the issue explore the complex narrative that is Africa.

But, reading through the writings, and the art, of this issue, I became aware of the *mundane* in the stories that were told. Africa, like Europe, like Latin America, etc, is a place where some people are living out their existence.

In this issue, a boy takes a girl out in Richard Ali's *The Attempted Killing of Faruk*; two girls have a conversation while riding a bus in Tosin Akingbulu's *Thirteen*; and two grown-ups talk about having sex in Sefi Atta's *A Safe Indiscretion*. And, yes, these stories come with their own unique spin, because Africa has undergone its own speciation.

This issue, in some way, answers the questions I raised at the beginning. We take a glimpse at some of the different happenings of, and in, life, which the setting may have played a part.

The setting is Africa.

Enjoy!

**Adauo A-O**

## Poetry for the Iroko Men

Godspower Oboido

---

I invented a simple vision  
Of the mosquito feasting  
On the bud of the hibiscus  
Sucking its sweetening nectar  
Promising me never to be drunk  
Again on our blood-red wine

I invented a simple vision:  
The king of the jungle appointed  
The tortoise as poet laureate  
*Ojualagba* was brilliant  
Birds were lulled to sleep—  
Little chicks gathered  
By their mother for her fowl tales  
Brilliant in true rendition

I invented a vision  
Of the merchant of the Libyan Desert  
No longer lusting over American Rice  
No longer crushing the Arab flowers  
Unspoiled in their youthful bloom

I invented a vision  
Of the pregnant Ugandan mosquito  
Dancing at a feast of nectar  
With all her invisible children

I invent a lucid vision  
Of the Iroko Men, assembled  
In a poetic commonwealth  
Dialoguing for Africa's change. □



# Okani-Nkam

## Modern Day Project

Esame Bassey

The Okani-Nkam Modern Day Project is a dual carriage road that my best friend, Comfort, says leads to the world.

The Okani-Nkam Modern Day Project is a dual carriage road that my best friend, Comfort, says leads to the world. Every day, truckloads of goods and traders bursting from each side rattle along this modern thoroughfare, on their way to the other side of the world. The road is busiest at Christmas, bringing back diseases and woes and Okani-Nkam people who have lived in the world for so long that they look at us (the ones who have not been outside the village) the same way we look at them, like aliens. My father refers to the road as the broad way; smooth, easy, and plagued with whoredom and drunkenness and rottenness that stinks and ranks to the high heavens. The *narrow* way however (a road he fervently prescribes) is winding, thorny, but rewarding.

The first time I met my father's younger brother, Kumasi, I knew he had travelled the broad way. He was tall and muscular and had a carefree air about him that Comfort found sexy, while Father was short and pudgy in areas that made him look unattractive; Comfort said Father was just fat. Uncle Kumasi was nothing like my father's other brother, Godswill, who visited the village every Christmas, until he met a woman from God-knows-where and now he says he doesn't believe in God anymore. Comfort says he is lost. Uncle Kumasi never even worked for Chung Bro & Sons, where Father and Godswill worked as cooks and where Father had only recently been promoted to Chief Cook after over a decade of

dishing out Chinese food and smelling as if he was carrying rotten meat in his pocket.

But my Uncle Kumasi smelled of someone he called 'Issy Miyaki'. He said it in that soft sensuous voice that Comfort also found sexy.

'I thought it was his body that was sexy?' I asked.

'Idiot, don't you know that a person's voice can be sexy? Abroad everything is sexy, even dogs and cats and they even wear sunglasses.' Comfort said, fluttering her fake eyelashes like a baby doll running out of batteries.

'Dogs?'

'Yes, dogs.'

'How can a dog wear sunglasses?'

'Bush girl,' Comfort hissed and sucked her teeth at me. 'You do not even know *anything*.'

'Eh..., because you are lying.' I said carefully, in order not to rattle her. She was different now. Since she returned from the city, we no longer played and laughed like we used to. I remembered how we once were, before the road was finished and people started travelling to see the world. I remembered us in primary school, before our breasts formed and the trapped oils in our pores broke through as pimples. All Comfort and I did then was run around bare feet playing *nsa* and *ten-ten* and chasing red-necked lizards down the sloppy road that led to the stream. The lizards travelled the same course each time, in-between small islands of thickets, running heedlessly towards the stretch of green

at the back of the Community College and then falling into the stream.

'Okay, if you think I am lying, ask Kumasi.'

'Uncle Kumasi...'

'Yes,' Uncle Kumasi said, clearing his throat like Father does whenever he wants to say something important. 'Dogs do wear sunglasses. Even cats and monkeys. In fact, I have seen a dog wearing sunglasses in Cape Town. Eh... my friend's dog, it was.'

The bit about his friend's dog wearing sunglasses seemed like a lie, because he stammered at the end of the sentence. Father says when someone stammers it is often because they are lying. I tried to imagine Lucky, our neighbour's dog, wearing sunglasses. Lucky would probably eat the sunglasses before realizing what they were meant for, the same way he ate Comfort's fancy slippers that one of her lovers had brought her from Mombassa or Nampula or someplace close to the Indian Ocean. The same way he had dug into my ankle meat and left a deep scar that Comfort said I must hide if I was to find a husband successfully.

'Strange things happen in the world these days,' Uncle Kumasi said, rolling cannabis, offering me a smoke. I shook my head vigorously. Comfort hissed, and snatched it from him.

'I heard a story about a rich man in America who died and left 10 million dollars to his dog.' He said, his eyes became fixed, the creases on his forehead deepened. 'I would rule the world with such money.'

I lionized him, this uncle of mine, this enigma of a man, with his jutting jaw, carved hairline and bright-coloured ties.

□

News of Uncle Kumasi's exploits with women littered the streets, but the women loved him still. He used to perch underneath the mango tree to serenade them as they made their way to the evening market. When the faint, reedy vibrations from his harmonica greeted their ears, they would abandon their chatter and gather to hear him sing. His original songs were mostly vulgar songs, which compared women to different soups.

*'Soup, soup, soup, O sweet soup.  
I have eaten soups—Egusi Soup,  
Okra soup, vegetable soup—  
but none is as sweet as you, my sweet, sweet soup.  
I will die happy with you in my belly  
Sweet, sweet soup.'*

The women would smile coyly, fluttering their eyelashes as they sang with him, swaying their hips rhythmically from one side to the other, hoping that they might be that next soup, that next woman, that next song.

□

Uncle Kumasi left after he had an argument with Father. It started in the small hours of the morning, after Uncle Kumasi came home again smelling of alcohol and cannabis.

'How many times did I call you, Kumasi?' My father asked, shouting, his deep voice carried far into the night.

'I didn't count' Kumasi casually replied.

'Why do you have to come back so late, everyday? People are saying you smoke *igbo* and that you sleep around with small girls and even married women. Kumasi, is this true?'

'I don't have to explain my actions to you, just because I manage to live in this dump, this shithole that smells like an abattoir doesn't mean you can treat me like a child, you are only my brother, not my father.' Kumasi said.

His words angered my father and he began to shake.

'How dare you? I am an honest man, Kumasi, what are you? What can you say for yourself? You want to be a musician, you want to sing here, there, places you don't even know. Do you think just saying you want to be this and that means you are what you say?'

Father stood up and as he approached Uncle Kumasi, his hands shook violently. 'You are in the afternoon of your life, Kumasi, you are no longer young, your mates are married and fending for their families, you are still living in my house, eating my food and you have the audacity to call my house a dump?' My father stood close to Kumasi, glaring at him.

'I will pluck off those eyeballs if you don't move away from me now.'

I clutched the curtains tightly, praying that they would stop shouting; they did, but only to start fighting. Kumasi pushed Father, then Father lurched back at Kumasi.

'I will kill you, Kumasi, let me just lay my hands on my shotgun, I will blow off your stupid head before that *igbo* you smoke blows it off for you.'



'I will kill you first, Andrew, I will wring this fat neck of yours until your breath stops.'

□

Many years later, Comfort brought back news from the Okani-Nkam Modern Day Project. She said Genesis, the skinny lorry driver who supplied her oranges she sold by the roadside, was the news carrier.

'He said Kumasi is coming home to hold a concert at the Town Hall.'

'Genesis said Kumasi's posters are all over the world.' Comfort rolled her big eyes as she spoke. 'He is coming with his manager to perform at the Town Hall. Genesis says his manager is from China.'

'China?' I repeated.

'Yes, the manager is from China. Genesis said Kumasi met him at one of his concerts in Asia.'

'Asia?'

'Why are you repeating things like an idiot?'

'Papa said I am not an idiot.'

'Genesis said Kumasi is touring Asia,' she continued, like I had said nothing.

'Genesis said Kumasi is selling out shows all over the world, he is a superstar now.' She said, moulding her lips into a pout, one of the bizarre habits she had brought with her from the world.

'A superstar?'

'Am I speaking Swahili?' she asked and sucked her teeth at me.

My Uncle Kumasi's homecoming was that of a hero. Comfort and I waited for him along with the rest of the villagers by the side of the Okani-Nkam Modern Day Project. We brought our jugs of water and our mats and waited patiently, sweating profusely, singing choruses, hymns and folk songs until we became tired of clapping and our mouths refused to open anymore, so we sat silently and waited until Uncle Kumasi arrived with the Chinese man he called his manager. They both reeked of marijuana and sweat and looked like people on the verge of a disease.

The concert was sold out. Layabouts made extra money constructing makeshift shelters and selling fake tickets at half the ticket price. By the time the manic crowd of alcohol-charged teenagers had been sufficiently amused, and the middle-aged women who sold bean-cake and cold pap had been pushed to one side, Uncle Kumasi staggered onto the stage. Comfort and I started counting our goose bumps. We were at 504 when Uncle Kumasi began to sing, he sang and danced and gyrated (like a man possessed) in a drug - fuelled performance that left our lips parted. He finished, and we clapped first before anyone else. I was, after all, his only relative... well, direct relative (because every other person in Okani-Nkam is related in some way). I was certainly the most related of all the relatives in the hall. Father and his other siblings had refused to attend the concert. As for me, I had attended against my father's will.

'No child of mine will go to the devil's party. I forbid you. If I see you anywhere close to that hall, I will disown you.' My father had threatened when he found out I was going.

‘But...’

‘No buts. I am your father, I give the rules and you obey.’

Comfort had told me that in the world, when people turn 18, they become adults, and becoming an adult means you can break all the rules.

‘Which rules?’

‘Idiot! The rules your parents set for you, every rule.’

‘Listen once you become 18, you become an adult. You are grown up. You can disobey your parents, start telling lies, move out of the house... many things you can do.’

Father referred to people like Comfort as wolves in sheep’s clothing. When with father, she would cower and open her eyes so wide I could see cherubs singing in paradise, but away from him, she would tell me bewildering things.

‘But how come Fine Boy, who is nearly 30 years old, is still living with his parents and still fetching water for his mother?’

Comfort looked at me with eyes that could kill. ‘Stupid girl, how can you call someone like Fine Boy an adult? Do you not see how water drips out of his mouth like a tap that is not properly closed? Does he look like an adult to you?’

I stared at Comfort like an idiot.

When I returned home that night, I met my clothes in the yard. I cried and banged on the door and flung myself on the ground and screamed for my father to let me in. My screaming brought out the neighbours from behind their worn curtains. They stood in loose clusters and

stared at me from afar. They stood shaking their heads, cradling loose bosoms in the crook of their arms, muttering amongst themselves.

Then Comfort emerged from the crowd, a frown smeared across her face. She pulled me up from the floor, dusted my hair with her bare hands, cleaned the kohl and mascara that clogged my eyes and blackened my cheeks with the hem of her dress. She straightened my flared skirt, pulled the tube dress she had let me borrow from her firmly over the conspicuous swells of my breast, trying to bring back a semblance of decency to my lewd state.

The neighbours stood there, folding their hands, unfolding them and staring at me from afar.

‘You are behaving like an idiot,’ Comfort whispered into my ear as we walked by the uneven margins of the Okani-Nkam Modern Day Project that led to the world.

‘Eighteen-year-olds get thrown out of the house every day in Europe and America. They don’t make a fool of themselves like you have.’

‘But what am I going to do now? I am not like all those adults in Europe and America. I don’t know what to do. I am scared!’

‘You have to be strong. You have to be courageous. Those adults abroad do courageous things because they have, eh... something called, eh...,’ she paused, thinking for a while. ‘Guts. That’s it, guts.’

‘How can I get this, uh... this guts?’

As we delicately treaded the uneven margins of the Okani-Nkam Modern Day Project, Comfort told me some gut-

inspired tales that made the blood in my heart pump faster. She said there was a world out there waiting for idiots like me. The world would take me in, she said. It would embrace me, like a mother's arms wrapped around her child. I tried to imagine how it would feel to have my mother's arms wrapped around me. All I could remember was her cold, black body lying motionless in the wooden coffin that held her. Comfort said it was time to get drunk. She said alcohol was good because it made you do extraordinary things, things you could only do when you had guts. Comfort showed me how to do some gut-inspired things. She showed me how to light a cigarette from the dying embers of firewood. She taught me how to cup my hands around the cigarette. She warned me to be wary of crosswinds and to watch out for my fingers. She taught me how to hold a smoke in my mouth, how to inhale without choking, and how to pucker my mouth and exhale with a careless abandon synonymous to the people of the world.

Comfort taught me how to use slang and swear words like: cool, chillax, watsup, how far, fuck off, fuck you..., she taught me how to do short laughs.

'Hehe... hehe.'

'That sounds like a she-goat in labour,' I said.

'They call it giggle. No, giggling.'

'Gingle? You mean they gingle like that? Like she-goats?'

'Giggle, gi-gg-ling. That is how teenagers in the world laugh.'

'Teenagers, I thought they were adults?'

Comfort looked at me like I was an idiot. Then she took my hands in hers with a deliberateness that befuddled me.

'There is something I should tell you,' she began. 'I am leaving. I am going away soon, away from Okani and Nkam. I am going to the world.'

I was speechless.

'Not now, though, not straightaway, maybe a week, maybe two, but I will come back and take you with me, I promise.'

My befuddlement endured.

'Chief Brown will send me some money. He said he will send it through Genesis when next he comes from the East. Enough money to buy a one-way pass, he will send, and some more to buy boiled eggs and plantain chips on my way there. He said he will take me to Lagos and Onitsha and Freetown. But we will return, and I will leave him after he has bought me a car like he promised. I will come back and take you with me in my car, and together we will live in a small room I rent with the money I steal from him, and I will get a job making people's hair. I hear it is big business in Lagos. And you can fall in love like you always want to and have as many children as you want to. But me, I will meet another Chief, who will buy me shoes and designer clothes, and he will build me a house, a proper house made from glass, and you can come and visit, your husband and you and the children, but you mustn't throw stones, neither must the little ones, that I will not allow in my glass house.'

'You promise?'

'I promise.'

The road took Comfort and didn't bring her back. It didn't bring back news of how she was or where she was or which man's bed she warmed. For a long time the road was silent. Then on a dull damp day, just before the rains started, the road opened its jaws and spewed out news. Comfort was not coming back home. The road had swallowed her, all six feet of her. It had compressed her chunky flesh and long legs and distributed them all over the road, and now, there was nothing to bring home to bury.

News of my Uncle Kumasi's grave illness came from the people that travelled the road. They said everyone in Lagos was talking about him; the famous musician who was dying in squalor in an unnamed hospital. We received his gaunt body from Genesis. My Uncle came alone, without his manager, the thin bony faced Chinaman who chewed on tobacco and smiled constantly at imagined things. He came without the fanfare and women hanging off his arms. He came without alcohol, without the drugs, only him: blood, water, and bones encased in blue, baggy pants and a yellow shirt inscribed with the words LIFE IS SHORT, LIVE IT.

'I saw him in the hospital like that,' Genesis said, 'the doctor said he doesn't have long to live,' Genesis carried him

easily from the back of his Goods Only Lorry and dropped him on the plank we had brought. Uncle Kumasi's long frame, which used to be an object of great fascination to many women, lay now on the plank like Mr Bones, the deformed skeleton dangling by its neck at the health centre at Nkam. His lips were parted in what resembled a smile, a continuous deathly smile that troubled me. His sleepy white eyes, now the colour of chilli and dripping with rheum, stared at me.

In silence, we carried him away from the villagers and their hollering and their prying eyes that thrived on gossip. We carried him past the thick coppices of shrubs and rows and rows of dense undergrowth inundated with copulatory chirps from male crickets who had successfully wooed a female and those who were in the process of wooing. We carried him past the sluggish bayou filled with dead fish and dead leaves and live salamanders with their rudimentary legs dangling lifelessly behind them. We carried him through winding waterways, littered with drying excreta and maggots and the smell of decay that hung about us, unshakable like death.

In silence we carried him home. □

# *Something Else Not Violence*

**Keguro Macharia**

I have been trying to write about this *Something Else Not Violence* for a few days, now. It frightens me. It frightens me because I do not know.

## **Eastleigh (1977-1990)**

Until his death in 1990, my father was an obstetrician-gynecologist with a practice in Pangani-Eastleigh. As I understood and continue to understand his work, he brought children into the world through a complex magic that ensured both mothers and their children survived and thrived. Many, if not most, of his patients were Somali. When I visited him at work, I was always impressed by his tenderness, his amazing ability to make his patients—mothers, fathers, children—love him. And love him they did. Eastleigh, my father's Eastleigh, taught me how to think about life and death, about kinship and labor, about cultural exchange based on mutual reciprocity.

I learned to think about what it meant to make life, to enable living, to incarnate promise as, in, and through my father's Somali clients, patients, friends. For me, the very notion of life and living is incarnated as Somali.

## **Eastleigh (1994-1995)**

From May 1994 through July 1995, I worked at the family business, as a low-level clerk. Business is not quite the right word when one works in and around medicine: one is confronted with the quotidian business of life and death, birth and demise. It was one thing to watch my father with his clients, patients, friends; it was another thing to interact with them in his absence.



Perhaps my favorite part of the job was going to the nursery to look at newborns. Many, perhaps most, newborns were unsightly. Not yet ready to be presented to the world. But, every so often, a baby incarnates everything we want to believe about newborns as gifts from the gods. I remember two newborns whose being in the world took my breath away. Again, Somali bodies, lives.

### Eastleigh (2012)

I sent an email to a good friend today. It was a difficult one to write. Let me copy what I wrote.

*Most of my father's clients were Somalis. Most of the hospital's patients were Somali. But patients are not right: the women giving birth to Somali children. I worked there, briefly, after high school, in 1994. Today, the children I saw born are old enough to be killed in Eastleigh.*

*I'm finding this very difficult to write, but I think it needs to be said. Were I selfish, I'd say we are killing my father's lifework—the relationships he forged, the communities he served and loved. I think I need to be this selfish for now. I'm grateful he's not here to watch this. To watch us kill the people he helped bring into this world.*

This is how I come to Eastleigh: as a son and worker, a hovering presence at life and death, an intimate stranger.

□

Because I come to Eastleigh—and Somalis via Eastleigh—through bio-medicine, through my father's emergency calls in the middle of the night, his joy when life thrives, his anxieties when life falters, his sorrow when life ends; because I understand Eastleigh—and Somalis via Eastleigh—through bio-medical struggles to “make live,” to prolong health, to “make generations”; because I come to

Eastleigh—and Somalis via Eastleigh—through the culture-bridging practices demonstrated by my father's practice that made palpable the ethics of care, emphasizing collectivity-making as a desire for others to thrive, I am struggling to understand how Eastleigh—and Somalis via Eastleigh—has become available for genocidal imaginations.

If there's a question, it has to do with how places and populations become killable: the relationship between ecocide and genocide. I am looking neither for a historical explanation nor a conceptual one. No answer should suffice. There should be something impossible about making others killable. I want to insist there should be. To be naïve, if only for a moment.

Those who track longer Kenyan histories will tell me what's happening is not new. And will point out, rightly, that Somalis are only one group among the many in Kenya's history and present who have been made killable. Indeed, at a certain moment in our too-recent history, the term citizen translated, loosely, as killable.

□

In an extended, ongoing email conversation, I tell friends that I am interested in Something Else Not Violence, by which I hope to describe a process through which violation and injury fail to register as requiring action or even notice.

From friends and colleagues, teachers and mentors, scholars and critics, archives and research, I have learned the vocabularies that efface violence: friendship, intimacy, pedagogy, acculturation, civilization, religious conversion, justice, redress, protection, conservation, pleasure, fun, duty,

responsibility, hygiene, health, patriotism, love. I have wondered if we make killable more often in the name of love than of hate or indifference. And, if so, how to think about the pull of love and the pull to love as difficult and dangerous. How to write a love story in the register of the killable. As a narrative of killability.

I have wanted to believe that naming something as violent accomplishes some work, even as we seem to back off to name our acts and beliefs as Something Else Not Violence. Something Else Not Violence that enables killing and *killability*. I am not thinking about euphemism, precisely, because euphemism recognizes what is being hidden or attenuated. Instead, I am interested in the un-naming of violence, the *unrecognizability* of genocidal imaginations.

I have been trying to write about this Something Else Not Violence for a few days, now. It frightens me. It frightens me because I do not know. Wait. Let me be more honest: I do not want to think about violence. I do not want to think about how its naming and un-naming, its legibility and illegibility, permits us to make ourselves and other killable. I do not want to be in a space where others try to convince me about the rightness of killability.

But our histories and loyalties do not permit us to evade our presents so readily. The eardrum-destroying music of the Eastleigh No. 6 and 9 matatus continues to throb in memory, if nowhere else: a beat in the blood. The smells and

sights of Eastleigh continue to shape my visual imagination of what collectivity might look like. The life-giving, life-enhancing, and pain-amelioration I witnessed at my parents' practice continue to direct how I think about life, love, death, kinship, care, intimacy, loss, grief, collectivity.

Eastleigh is part of my imaginative and affective terroir.

□  
Form tells its own story, and I realize how close this writing skates to the obituary/eulogy. Perhaps to suggest that a genocidal imagination has won and all I can do is mourn the passing of a place I once knew.

I write to friends that I do not know how to inhabit the "us" we are becoming, or, perhaps, have always been: at home with this Something Else Not Violence, bound by a genocidal imagination. This "us" from whom it is difficult to extricate myself as it labours in my name: Kenyan citizen.

Author's Note: This writing responds to efforts by the Kenyan government to criminalize and pathologize Somalis, efforts that have been a persistent feature of post-independence Kenyan history, and that have been newly revitalized since the U.S. declared "War on Terror" a global undertaking. □

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*Something Else Not Violence* is a Blog Post on Keguro Macharia's blog, [www.gukira.wordpress.com](http://www.gukira.wordpress.com)

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*3 Poems*  
**Peter Akinlabi**

Kidal | Bukavu | Jos

*Kidal*  
**Peter Akinlabi**  
*For Baba Toure*

---

Darkest things always invade you here in Kidal,  
lengthening the shadows that swaddle convictions  
and the crust of honour. You imagined it a hearse at mass, voluble  
in sadness, and strangely solicitous like the prostrate  
hulk of a gutted house

You shall feel the sad-slow whirling  
even in the word I seek to evoke the spluttering  
lights of these times, a hypnosis of gore, imploding  
dusk in the soul of all that is living

But you, I imagine, may not find the right bank  
to perch and gather your pen and paper, injuries,  
and a disfigured confidence, scribing as you do,  
the northern rim of the national eclipse

The world bleeds, pubic waste sticky on the hooves  
of her own flight. Men, jousting rogue truths  
in contests of blindness might arrive finally  
to the infidelity of their vague credo

It is a gutted house, this place where all strays like faith,  
untethered, mapping the lineage of minds  
in visible terms of fire, stoking a dreadful bequest  
with the middle finger of infection. □

**Bukavu**  
**Peter Akinlabi**  
*For Bapurwa Mwamba*

---

The air dresses the night in red still, turning  
the eye of rage upon a world already much harried  
by the tarnished heirloom of history

For some, living is the first test of courage. But like you,  
masking no intents, are those whose eyes  
have finally closed to the sanitary ritual of blood

There are others in Kinshasa, in Bukavu, leaning  
on infested moments with frightening resolve of a prey; eyes that fear  
has made bayonet-steel, red-crossed, divining the greys  
of their dying moments for hope

How much pain can you count in this world-forgotten nebula,  
caught in the blinding reseau like this, how much pus  
on the soles of those condemned to a blistering  
diaspora?

Arrows of gloom will find their own Troy for grisly  
solicitude, leaving their wilful realism, dilated in oblation,  
to foreclose our cross breaths

Today the world will sleep thinking of climate change,  
leaving me and you to gather the limbs of Congo,  
the giant clone in a violated field of gold. □



**Jos**  
**Peter Akinlabi**  
*For Gimba Kakanda*

---

The prize was delivered with all its black image and intent:  
a child's garbled skull, buried in the rubble  
of what yesterday was home

Sunset was beautiful over West of Mines,  
It could be foggy at Anglo-Jos this time of the year,  
but we will not relish such borderline pleasures now, our procession  
of bones yodels, backward to the kiln of vivisection

To write this is to walk the abattoir of belief,  
to awaken the intemperate ardour of listening to easy breathing  
of skull carriers, to remember those whose feet had failed,  
ravaged in familiar darkness held in ill-accented autos-da-fe

I know you too wake up in the morning, fevered with darkness in the headlines,  
hearing only the sorrowful stutter of that name repeated  
with strange tongues of newscasters, a wrench of mono-syllabic stab...

So, can we ever remember the exact moment when we learnt  
that a prayer had different names, or that a city, like a myth,  
was a code too easily broken?

Sir, to write this is to whistle on the left side of fade,  
to resist the white embrace of forgetfulness, to feel in the umbilical  
rot of a wagered earth for the echo of love's failure

Still there is always the perfect grit on the road,  
perhaps your own war of fusion, knowing the world cannot recoil  
enough; perhaps, too, the city's own grave grace, limping its devastation along  
in a spreading plateau of surly mines. □

*“All in the Night Together”*  
**Brendan Bannon & Mike Pflanz**

Daily dispatches

On Nairobi’s streets with people who earn  
their living during darkness

Photographs by Brendan Bannon  
Text by Mike Pflanz



**Jairus Mulela, 23, BBQ Chef:** “Fridays and Saturdays I am outside here. I don’t mind this job, it just gets difficult when it’s late and there are a lot of people and someone can steal a sausage without you being able to do anything about it.”



**Johnny Be Good & Ocha Ocha, Trash Scavengers:** “We walk from early until 2am, collecting the plastic bottles people drop. Then we go home and sleep and when we wake up we go and sell them. We get 17¢ for 2lbs of bottles.”



**John Mbogo, 32, Car Washer:** “When it rains I get good business because the cars get so muddy. I earn maybe \$2 a night, but we always give some to the street kids who come crying to us and we pity them. We’re all in the night together.”



**Walter Ngau, 36, Taxi Driver:** “This is a business when sometimes you lose and sometimes you profit.”



**Phillip 'Fubu' Otieno, 27, Doorman:** "Daytimes, I'm a professional boxer. This job is not bad, the boss is good, when I have a fight he lets me go for leave. Things are easier now, years back, there were many thugs and I was the one to deal with them."



**Kimoja, 31, Busker:** "Some days people are nice, somedays people won't even look at you, but I feel good working here. Even though it's now 3am, I don't get tired because playing guitar is my passion, I don't know what else I can do in my life."



## In Conversation

### Sefi Atta & Dami Ajayi

Saraba's fiction editor and co-publisher interviews a leading light in contemporary African literature

Sefi Atta was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. She was educated there, in England and the United States. She qualified as a chartered accountant in England and as a CPA in the United States. In 2001, she graduated with MFA from Antioch University, Los Angeles. She currently lives in Meridian, Mississippi.

Sefi is the author of *Everything Good Will Come*, *Swallow* and *News from Home*. Her short stories have appeared in journals such as *Los Angeles Review*, *Mississippi Review* and *World Literature Today*. They have won prizes from the *Zoetrope Short Fiction Contest* and the *Red Hen Press Short Story Award*, and have been finalists for *Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award* and the *Caine Prize for African Literature*. In 2004, Sefi was awarded *PEN International's David TK Wong Prize*, in 2006, the *Wole Soyinka Prize for Publishing in Africa*, and in 2009, the *Noma Award for Publishing in Africa*. Also a playwright, her radio plays have been broadcast by the BBC and her stage plays have been performed internationally. *A Bit of Difference* is her latest novel.

Sefi Atta was recently in Nigeria to launch her *A Bit of Difference*. Saraba's Fiction Editor, Dami Ajayi, was in attendance. He enjoyed reading the new novel; he is convinced that it raised several pertinent issues that borders on the immigrant experience, homosexuality and the upper echelon of the Nigerian middle class. Here is a conversation conducted via e-mail.

**DAMI AJAYI:** *A Bit of Difference* contains a potpourri of themes, which is expected of a novel. In the fabric of the Nigerian scenes is a strong sense of the Pentecostal movement, which is quite influential in modern Nigeria. In fact, a friend once concluded that the churches have gone crazy. Of course, there is that pithy aphorism that religion is the opium of the people. Some also argue that religion is an integral part of culture. But in the portrayal of the protagonist's family, the Bellos, they are seemingly not religious; they are rather engrossed in their internal conflicts. Can it be said that their apathy to religion is a Nigerian middle class tendency or just peculiar to the Bellos?

**SEFI ATTA:** I agree with your friend. The atmosphere of religiosity in Nigeria is a bit too much for me, and it doesn't seem to improve morality or foster love and understanding. I believe in God and pray every day. I'm not against religion; I'm against religious hypocrisy, fundamentalism and intolerance, Christian and Moslem. Of course, I would rather be at the mercy of Bible bashers than suicide bombers. But fear drives the spread of religiosity and fear is what extremists worship. I can't make generalizations about middleclass attitudes to religion. What I can say is that the Bellos are a lot like my family and others I grew up with. One parent is Christian and the other is Moslem, or they have Christian and Moslem relatives.

They are not apathetic; they are open-minded.

**DA:** Deola Bello, a Nigerian auditor with an international charity organization, blows the whistle on a seemingly phony Nigerian NGO's scheme which would probably enrich its proprietor, Mrs. Rita Nwachukwu. But there is also a reference to a small lie Deola told at her job interview. Is it likely that she is just as morally bankrupt as Mrs. Rita Nwachukwu, if one were to use the biblical allusion that a sin is a sin is a sin regardless of its size?

**SA:** It is not for me to decide. Perhaps financial fraud is as sinful as lying in a job interview about a sport you played in school. If so, we're all in trouble.

**DA:** While reading the beginning of the novel set in America and England, the protagonist shared some similarity with Teju Cole's *Open City's* Julius in terms of the flaneur tendencies, acute observation and a flair for transcontinental commentary. How much biography and authorial opinions went into the making of such gorgeous descriptions and sublime sense of geography?

**SA:** To write a novel, I must share my protagonist's views to some degree. I agree with a lot of Deola's observations and commentary, but more significantly, we have been to the same places. For example, she went to Queen's College and her unnamed school in England is based on Millfield, a school I attended. Millfield wasn't your average boarding school. The students there were quite worldly, though I didn't think so at the time. I didn't delve into the school's culture because it wasn't relevant to Deola's story, but I put her in places I'd been on purpose, in Lagos, Abuja, Atlanta and London, to get a strong

sense of place. We don't have the same biography though, and I would not make the choices she makes or react as she does.

**DA:** Bandele is a deftly-rendered complex character. And this is not only because he is a writer. There is the question of his sexual orientation which was unknown to the protagonist who was his friend. In a sense, repression of sexual orientation is the staple fate of gay Nigerians who might suffer more restriction in the light of the intended legislation. How do we emphasize that being gay is not only cosmopolitan but very individualistic and Nigerian, with and without literature?

**SA:** I honestly don't know. Gay Nigerians would have to tell us how and the trouble is they can't. I don't even know how they get on with their lives despite the prejudices they face. It must be terrifying and exhausting to hide your sexuality and pretend you're attracted to the opposite sex. Most heterosexual Nigerians I know are ignorant about homosexuality rather than homophobic. I had to show, through Deola, that heterosexuals who are ostensibly open-minded can be ignorant as well as indifferent. I was very much against the proposed homosexual bill, but speaking to other Nigerians, I got the impression that it wasn't an issue for them.

**DA:** I'm wary of novels targeted at societal problems but enjoy how the realities of HIV/AIDS and casual sex are enmeshed into the narrative and even made into the premise of the plot. Was this deliberate or was it one of those fictional happy accidents? And how does this play into how you go about your fiction?

**SA:** I'm not a fan of novels that champion social causes. I read them, but I would literally fall asleep if I had to write one. I just can't write about casual sex in this day and age and ignore HIV. The virus has changed narrative. Now, if you write a sex scene, you might have to mention condoms. That is reality.

**DA:** This might be a far-reaching compliment but I am yet to read a more insightful expose on the Nigerian bourgeoisie, especially the progenies of the early Nigerian elites. The middle-class is perhaps the most fluid and arbitrary social class. Some even argue about the economic collapse of the middle-class during the military rule in Nigeria. Is the middle class an anthropological concept as much as it is an economic stratum in today's Nigeria?

**SA:** Thank you. I write about Lagos society as an insider with love, honesty and hopefully the irreverence it deserves. My father was Secretary of State in General Gowon's regime. He died in office and partly because his absence shaped my sensibility, I don't take Lagos society too seriously. "Middleclass" is a lazy description at best. It is not even that useful as an economic classification as it covers anyone from a school teacher to a bank CEO. At worst, it makes people feel unjustifiably superior, inferior, envious and entitled. Same with other terms like "elite" and "masses" that we use as references. You are right that they are arbitrary and fluid. In Nigeria, if you have education, money and power in various combinations, you fit the bourgeois bill, but it wasn't that long ago that it was unfashionable to be described as bourgeois and Fela dismissed it as colonial mentality.

The colonials were the first threat to the Nigerian middleclass. My father may not

have been recruited into the Colonial Office after he graduated from Achimota School and Balliol College but for an exonerating memo dated April 26, 1947 that went like this: "Mr. Abdul-Aziz Atta is qualified academically and by character for the post which he applies. It seems possible that the training he has in the Gold Coast and in the United Kingdom has overcome the typical Igbirra defects of character, namely excitability and vindictiveness that are prominent in his father, the Atta." My grandfather was a traditional ruler, the Atta of the Igbirra people, and he had fallen out with the colonials.

After Independence, the middleclass flourished for a while, until the civil war created further complications and imbalances, but these days Nigeria doesn't belong to the old guard anymore. Military rule contributed to that. For example, Murtala Mohammed's six-month regime destabilized the middleclass when he threatened the job security of top civil servants in an attempt to stamp out corruption. Ibrahim Babaginda's Structural Adjustment Program all but wiped out the middleclass. They fell as the value of the Naira fell, which is why economic policies that free markets while confining people to penury make little sense to me. 419 is a result of SAP. It is white-collar crime, essentially. I'm waiting to see how the petrol price hike will affect us in years to come. The very children that pester us at traffic lights for car washes might be stealing cars tomorrow. But some economic policies have been favorable. The privatization of the banking industry in the 1980s gave the middleclass a partial boost.

There have been other shifts within the middleclass that are related to politics and economics. The household names of

my parents' generation are not the household names of my generation. Now, I don't recognize half the names that get dropped. Every time I visit Lagos, someone new is on the scene. Social elitism has been reduced to Moët Rosé champagne and Hermès Birkin bags. People get upset about the materialism of the nouveau riche, but money itself is relatively new in Nigeria. It's not as if we have wealthy families that go back more than a couple of generations and most of us are one or two degrees separated from a village.

I observe Lagos society with anthropological curiosity, and I am both amused and bemused by the changes. On New Year's Eve I went to Lagos Motor Boat Club with my family and it was full of Nigerians in formal wear, and D'banj was playing. After midnight, we came out to look for our driver who had been to church and were swarmed by paraplegic beggars on wooden trolleys. It was Kafkaesque and shameful. My husband is a Ransome-Kuti—probably the most left-wing family in Lagos. Earlier in the evening, we had been with his cousins and he would have preferred to stay with them. I told him we'd made some progress because there was a time when New Year's Eve at the boat club was a few expats and Nigerians in casual wear, joining hands to sing "Auld Lang Syne," which, to this day, I can't tell you what the words mean. As a writer, these changes give me fodder for stories. I keep saying I won't write another novel, but how can I not keep up with Lagos society?

**DA:** This is a very insightful treatise on the Lagos middle class. But I have always been suspicious of Fela's dismissal of the Lagos middle class ethos as colonial mentality. He was also very middle class until his rascality got the better of him in

the late Sixties. So should we expect another middle-class Lagos novel from you any time soon?

**SA:** Fela swam against the tide and I admire him very much for that. His lyrics are autobiography, social commentary, and political and economic history combined. I would say his artistry got the better of him and the people he criticized in his songs were the rascals. But yes, I have two novels in progress that fall within that category. One, set during Murtala Mohammed's regime, examines Lagos society through the friendship between a Nigerian woman and an American woman, and another, set in the early 2000s, is about a Nigerian man who emigrates to America with his family. It might take a while to get them right.

**DA:** As we approach the denouement, it becomes obvious that the book is about decisions and their outcomes. And ultimately, about finding love. Tessa, Deola's friend, called finding love a comedy of errors and this rang true even in the unlikely compromise between Wale and Deola. Can we say that this is a rather tidy ending for the novel or just a good place to lay the story to rest?

**SA:** Can't it be both? It felt right to me. That's about it.

**DA:** [*Laughs*] I don't think it can be both. So which would you rather chose?

**SA:** If I have to choose, I will lie!

**DA:** Dara is a Nigerian musician who projects himself falsely for the purpose of fame. I've met such characters in several Diaspora stories. The most hilarious was in Akin Adesokan's *Knocking off Tommy's Hustle* in *AGNI*. Is this a popular trend amongst immigrants? Are we not all in one way or the other pandering to the

West—especially when we reference Deola’s tendency also to switch accents.

**SA:** It’s not an immigrant phenomenon. I listen to radio in Nigeria and radio hosts put on American accents. Nigerians in Nigeria switch accents. Give a Nigerian a microphone and their accent changes. But I have observed this about people of other nationalities. People speak in different voices for all sorts of reasons. I don’t think this is necessarily a bad thing. It might be as simple as communicating in the easiest possible way or as complex as colonial mentality, but as a writer if you have an observation that is relevant to your story, you can’t ignore it. Deola switches accents reluctantly to fit in with the corporate culture overseas. Dara is trying to make his name internationally as an Afro hip-hop musician. He is a player, in the theatrical and slang sense, and, as my daughter would say, don’t hate the player, hate the game. As a Nigerian writer published overseas, I have seen that there are ways to tell stories to get easy international recognition. It’s not that I don’t want to pander or any such lofty ideal; I just can’t be bothered. I’m too bogged down with trying to tell stories in ways that interest me.

**DA:** Well, about the radio host accent, I happened upon a Facebook Update which became an assertion rendered popular in minutes. Kola Tubosun, a linguist and editor of a Nigerian literary magazine, wrote, “That usually unconvincing but foreign-sounding accent on Nigerian radio...isn’t a “fake American accent” but a “Lagos Middle-class accent” of Nigerian English. What are your thoughts?”

**SA:** If you live in Nigeria and you’ve never lived in America, and you say wanna and gonna, something is off, however you define it.

**DA:** Still on Dara, *Polygamy helps. When men have several women, they don’t sleep around.*

Polygamy is hugely legal in Africa and it is a concern of our contemporary literature notably Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* and Bimbo Adelakun’s *Under the Brown Rusty Roofs*. Polygamy is arguably an African norm but westernization is persuading a rethink. What are your thoughts on polygamy as a remedy to casual sex, the rising spate of aging spinsters and the transmission of sexually-transmitted diseases?

**SA:** I have to say that I’m as clueless about polygamy as I am about juju, which is strange because polygamy is practiced openly. I’ve just not been around openly polygamous families. I have been around a lot of families whose fathers have other families outside their homes, which says a lot about growing up in Ikoyi. Men and women in polygamous marriages are quite capable of having casual sex outside their marriages. Traditional arrangements give single women more options, if they can live with them, and if we’re talking about preventing sexually transmitted diseases, the focus should be on the steps people take to protect themselves, not on how they choose to cohabit.

**DA:** You chose the limited Third Person point of view which is quite technical; writers often get carried away and begin to head hop forgetting that they do not have the divine abilities of the standard Third Person. I often hear of authors who write a story from a point of view and then realize that they chose the wrong voice? What informed your choice of Deola’s voice and perception throughout the novel? Were you not tempted to enter say, Bandele’s head or Wale’s head?



**SA:** Again, my choice felt right. I wanted to stay close to Deola and I wasn't tempted to stray into any other character's head. Technically, the omniscient third person is a more difficult point of view to use because you can so easily lose control of a story. The first person is overused, so I thought I should try something different, but I'm so close to Deola in this story it almost reads like a first person narrative.

**DA:** Recently, you took the path of daring authors who self-publish in Nigeria. Why did you choose to plod this path? Were you dissatisfied with the way Nigerians go about traditional publishing? And per chance, will you encourage fledgling authors to go the way of self-publishing?

**SA:** I want to work with people who care about literature, not hustlers. The past two years have been about taking charge of my works in Nigeria. A writer's words are not always respected there. I've had people make unauthorized changes to my works and have been misquoted so many times in the newspapers, by the way.

Recently, the London Book Fair blogged an article in which I was quoted as saying that writing should be rooted in social realism. I said my writing was rooted in social realism. I would never tell other

writers how to write. I read another article in which I was quoted as saying Mississippi was the safest state in the United States when I said it was one of the sickest states on account of its high incidence of hypertension and diabetes. I also read a headline that said I didn't understand feminism, when I said I didn't understand why I was labeled a feminist writer.

It's hard enough justifying what I've written and statements I've made. Some of the articles alluded to the fact that I'm press shy, but that's because I don't want to spend time denying misquotes and because I grew up thinking that promoting my work was showing off. I'm changing my attitude, but there's only so far I can go before my next story calls. I feel very blessed to be able to write full-time. Next year I turn 50 and it's time to do what works for me. I recommend that other writers do whatever works for them.

**DA:** Sefi Atta, its being nice sharing your thoughts on your work in the most liberal and trajectory sense. Thank you for your time.

**SA:** Thank you for yours. □

## *A Safe Indiscretion*

Sefi Atta

She is heady from the Cointreau, but more so from the thought of having a safe indiscretion.

She calls Wale when she gets back to the Hilton in Abuja. He doesn't answer his phone and she doesn't leave a message after his recorded greeting, which ends with him saying, "Shalom." She is walking into the bathroom when her cell phone rings and she runs out. She sees Wale's number and takes a breath before she answers.

"Hello?"

He sounds angry. "Did you just call my number?"

"It's Adeola Bello."

"Hey! You're in town?"

"Yes."

"I thought someone was flashing me again."

"Flashing?"

"You've haven't heard of flashing? When you call, hang up and wait for a call back?"

She smiles. "Not used that way."

"So how are you, Adeola Bello?"

"Very well. I was hoping we could meet for a drink."

"When?"

She wrinkles her nose. Why is her heart beating faster?

"Tonight?"

He laughs. "Where?"

"I'm at the Hilton. What's so funny?"

"I didn't expect to hear from you."

"Why not?"

"I didn't ask for your number. It might have seemed..."

"It didn't seem anything."

"Good. I didn't want my staff to think I was, you know."

"You were fine. You weren't flirting."

"Who says?"

"So, I'll see you later?"

"What time?"

"Eight?"

"Eight, then."

She struts around her room, then she pats her cheek. She mustn't look desperate.

She has dinner at the hotel restaurant and returns to her room to take a bath and change. She sprays perfume on her wrist, smacks her lipstick in place. Her earring needs securing. She smoothes her eyebrows.

The front desk calls to say he has arrived and she goes downstairs again, this time pretending to take an interest in the décor in the lobby, which is reminiscent of a dictator's palace, with its crystal chandeliers, faux Louis Quatorze chairs and white marble floors. The light reflecting on the marble blinds her and she worries about slipping. There are a few expatriates and many Nigerians walking around in that

lethargic manner that is typical of loiterers in hotels.

Wale is by the front desk. He has made an effort, his shirt and trousers are pressed. He looks naturally trim. He stands with his back to the lift, which might be deliberate, and she is tempted to pinch his bottom and throw him off balance, but she taps his shoulder instead.

"Have you grown?" he asks, looking her up and down.

"My heels," she says.

He smiles as if she is a statue he can't quite take seriously.

"Shalom?" she says.

"Pele, then," he says. "Pele, if you prefer."

"Not really."

Pele doubles up as an apology. Pele might also mean he feels sorry for her.

In the lounge she orders a Cointreau. She has never had Cointreau before. It is strong and tastes of oranges. He has a neat brandy. She doesn't just like his eyes; she likes his way of looking at her as if she is a solo act. She is also aware of the stares she gets from the security guards who size her up as she tells him about her day at WIN.

"What pains me is that I now have to go back and admit to these people that Nigerians are fraudulent."

"She's just hustling like everyone else. She and the other woman, who might be trying to sabotage her."

"You think?"

"Of course. Even microfinance is a hustle now. The people who are meant to get it don't. It's all about competition here."

"They won't see it that way. All they know is Nigeria, corruption, 4-1-9, Internet crime. It's embarrassing."

"It is."

"And Elizabeth made more sense. Of course the women would want to do business. Of course they would. Business is what we do in Nigeria."

"We do."

Is she talking too much? She can't get away from the idea that she has failed the women, but not enough to disregard the irregularities she noted at WIN. She takes another sip and winces. The Cointreau is too concentrated for her.

"Your father's five-year memorial is on Sunday, isn't it?" he asks.

"Yes."

"How are the preparations going?"

"Fine. Everything is fine."

"It's good that we do that, remember those who have died."

She finds the idea of a five-year memorial artificial. She remembers her father when she smells a combination of whiskey, cigars, aftershave and perfume: the "grown-up party" smell. Or when she hears the music he listened to: his Ray Charles, Dave Brubeck and Dvořák. In her teens, they argued over music. "Who is this Teddy Pendergrass?" he would ask. "Have you heard Otis Redding?" "Who is this George Benson? Have you heard John Coltrane?" He pitied her because she didn't appreciate juju music. "Children of nowadays," he used to say. "You have no roots. You go any way the wind blows."

She would love to find his Bally slippers again, knowing that all he had to do was think where he last left them before asking her to look for them. And to watch Wimbledon on television with him. Every summer he was in London in time for Wimbledon, knocking things over while cheering and getting names wrong ("Matilda Navratilova").

"How old is your daughter?" she asks.

"Fourteen."

"Is it just you and her?"

"Her and me, that's it."

"Fourteen. People say thirteen is the tricky age, that you're still adjusting to the whole teen thing at thirteen."

"Which is why I have no intention of complicating her life further by making her a half-sister or stepchild."

He seems to be addressing someone else and this agitates her. They are talking too much about family.

He puts his glass down. "I have just put you off, haven't I?"

"No, no."

"See me. I have white hairs all over my head. No more raps."

"Some of us are not interested in being stepmothers, wicked or otherwise."

He smiles. "I didn't mean you."

"Please," she says. "I meet someone I like. Why would marriage be a consideration?"

His expression reminds her of the boys she chatted up as a teenager. They knew bad girls didn't talk as much.

“What?” she asks. “You’re underestimating me? I’ve had many men. I’m a very passionate lover.”

He laughs loud and claps, causing people to turn around.

She retaliates. “Isn’t it dangerous for you to leave a teenager at home on her own this late with armed robbers prowling?”

“She’s with her cousins.”

“You might want to pick her up soon,” she says, reaching for her glass.

“Her cousins are in Lagos.”

“So there is no reason to run home tonight.”

“No.”

She crosses her legs. It is not as if she has misinterpreted him or vice versa. She imagines his skin against hers, his hands, his tongue and hard-on. Her desire is insistent, almost jeering. Why the small talk? Why not now? She gave up her virginity when she had no more use for it. Losing her virginity was like discovering her hair was not her crowning glory.

She is heady from the Cointreau, but more so from the thought of having a safe indiscretion. A security guard in the lobby gives her the same meddlesome look she encountered when she sat down. That can happen in a Lagos hotel, but here there’s also Sharia law, which can make men act in overzealous ways.

“What if security stops us?” she asks.

“Who, these ones?”

“It’s me they are watching, not you. Weren’t there riots here when the Miss World contest was supposed to be staged? The fatwa on the journalist and all that?”

“Haba, things are not that bad.”

“Who says?” she asks. “Don’t they sentence women to death for fornication in these parts?”

“No one would dare sentence a woman like you.”

“That’s good. I don’t want to be disgraced meanwhile.”

“My house is not too far.”

“I can’t go to your house.”

“Why not?”

“I said I can’t go to your house.”

“I asked why not?”

“How do I know you’re not a killer?”

“Can’t I kill you here?”

She laughs and slaps her thigh.

“I will speak to the front desk,” he says.

He finishes his brandy. She abandons her Cointreau and goes ahead of him, so as to be sure she won’t be stopped. □

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“A Safe Indiscretion” is an excerpt from the novel *A Bit of Difference*. This excerpt has been reproduced with the author’s permission.

# Seretse, My King

## Donald Molosi

The ancestral blood we share is the ink I write with.

*Live musicians enter and take their places upstage.  
They begin to play 'BagammaNgwato ba ga Mabiletsa.'  
After two verses, musicians stop playing.  
The ensemble of villagers enters Center stage right  
carrying baskets, humming a folksong in a four-part  
harmony.  
Their entrances are staggered.  
Humming continues while the ensemble of villagers  
speaks.*

### ALL VILLAGERS

We begin with a folktale. About a boy who  
brought his  
father back from the dead.

### VILLAGER 1

It is said that there was once a boy who was  
living in a land far away from his *kgota*, his  
home. His father had died while the boy was  
very young so, he did not know his father.

*The 'boy,' a man in his twenties enters and stands  
Downstage left facing the audience. He is lit in a  
different color from the villagers, who are also facing  
downstage.*

### VILLAGER 2

When the boy was growing up and had become  
aware that he did not have a father, he had  
asked his mother -

### ALL VILLAGERS

Mother, where is my father?

### VILLAGER 3

And his mother had replied -

### **ALL VILLAGERS**

Your father is dead, my son. His name was Ngwedi, which means the moon.

### **VILLAGER 4**

His mother had also since died.

### **VILLAGER 1**

Now that the boy was living in Land-That-Is-Far-Away, he found himself wondering a lot about his father.

### **VILLAGER 4**

The people of Land-That-Is-Far-Away were treating the boy badly and beat him for no reason, and he wanted his father's protection.

### **VILLAGER 3**

He wondered and wondered about his father and wanted desperately to see him. He wondered for days and weeks and months.

### **VILLAGER 2**

One day, he decided to yoke the donkeys to the wagon and set off for his father's family dwelling place, his father's *kgota*.

### **VILLAGER 1**

Since his father's name was Ngwedi, the *kgota* was called Ngwedi after him because he had been its headman when he was alive.

### **VILLAGER 2**

It was evening when the boy left for his father's *kgota* and the clouds were gathering over the moon.

On the way he met a man and sang out to him -

### **ALL VILLAGERS AND BOY**

Take heed, those who delay me! Where is Ngwedi's *kgota*?

Listen to what I ask, for the clouds are where the moon was. Don't delay me.

### **VILLAGER 1**

The man said -



### **ALL VILLAGERS**

Stay on this road. You will meet some people going there. Ask them.

### **VILLAGER 3**

Stay on this road. You will meet some people going there. Ask them.

### **VILLAGER 1**

The boy continued his journey. On the way he met an old woman and he sang -

### **ALL VILLAGERS AND BOY**

Take heed, those who delay me! Where is Ngwedi's *kgota*?

Listen to what I ask, for the clouds are where the moon was. Don't delay me.

### **VILLAGER 2**

The old woman pointed to a place and said -

### **ALL VILLAGERS**

That is the *kgota* you want over there. Turn off the gravel road and you will get to it.

### **VILLAGER 3**

That is the *kgota* you want over there. Turn off the gravel road and you will get to it.

### **VILLAGER 2**

When the boy reached the *kgota*, he said to the people there -

### **BOY**

I am Morwangwedi, the son of Ngwedi. I want black sheep and black oxen; kill them for me. I am looking for the place where my father was buried.

### **VILLAGER 4**

And so the people of the *kgota* took him to the kraal and showed him his father's grave. The boy dug out his father's bones and fastened them together. When he had done this, he took the meat of the sheep and oxen and put it on the bones. Then the boy began to sing -

**BOY**

Take heed, those who delay me! Where is  
Ngwedi's shirt?  
Listen to what I ask, for the clouds are where the  
moon was. Don't delay me.

*(As each item of clothing is mentioned, the  
villagers pull it out of their baskets and dress the boy in  
it. Soft, dreamy guitar music plays as he is dressing.)*

**VILLAGER 3**

So, the people of the *kgota* gave him his father's  
shirt, and he put it on top of the meat of oxen  
and sheep which was fastened to the bones.

**VILLAGER 2**

Then the boy asked for his father's trousers in  
the same way.

**VILLAGER 1**

And his shoes.

**VILLAGER 2**

All the time urging them to hurry because the  
clouds were covering the moon.

**VILLAGER 4**

When the flesh was clothed, his father came to  
life.

The boy yoked the donkeys, took his father, and  
set off for Land-That-Is-Far-Away. And when he  
arrived with his father, the people treated the  
boy like a king.

**ALL VILLAGERS**

They did not treat him badly like before because  
he now had his father to protect him.

**VILLAGER 1**

The folktale ends here.

*Lights go out on the ensemble of villagers, and the Boy,  
now dressed in clothes of his historical 'father,' is  
brightly lit, isolated. He speaks directly downstage.*

## BOY

Seretse Khama, the sound of my drum. I speak your name.

Your spirit marches in my core, defiantly, and in your name I hear the proud sound of drums.

*Ke leungo la tiro ya diata tsa gago.* I am the confused, grateful fruit of your revolution.

Khama, I am but a nameless boy. I am a boy who regarded the mirror today and saw a drum. I literally saw a djembe head that had been slashed with something sharp. What use is it now?

What use are my words if my poem, devoid of craft, fails to convey the tragedy of a mute drum?

What use am I, impounded in these foreign mountains to beg and sigh?

Can you still these winds of unwelcome change?

Can you crack these indoctrinations? Wake me up to a revolution, sound of my drum.

For what use am I, impounded in these foreign mountains to beg and sigh?

Khama, I saw a mute drum today.

Keeper of the beat, you must not allow me to dance to a new tune unless I do it with the flair of a snake in the water, like a thing of wonder. Sekgoma's son, do not allow me sing of Renaissance unless I do it by crying on key to hear you.

Mma Phiri's son, you cannot allow me to feel pride unless it swells to barricade the frigid mountains that are these Massachusetts.

Bastilled in these foreign mountains still fogs my thoughts and rains in my eyes, King. I still scream about it in my poetry. But now that you have happened to me in a dream, King, and spoke *Setswana* to me and taught me how to play my drum and let my sound ring throughout the twilight mountains like a crack of fire... – I will cry and *build* at the same time.

Man I adore like a father, I thank you for happening just that once. The ancestral blood we share is the ink I write with.

King. In me, live again. Through me, dream again. □

## Nyamiri

### Okwuje Israel Chukwuemeka

They don't intervene. They don't come to plead on your behalf. You're all alone, enduring the nasty turn of circumstances.

The clamour of Navy boys echoes, resounding within the confines of your cabin. This sound is coming from the parade ground, ten metres away, where navy boys are arrayed, awaiting the presiding officer's address, before their plunge into the day's activities.

Your heart beats faster. You should be on the parade ground. But you're not. You're evading parade. And, should you be found doing this, you may be penalized, perhaps given a strip of grass to cut.

You remain in your cabin, sitting on your bunk. You can't go to the parade ground. Not today. Sub-lieutenant Danladi might be there. He had better not set his eyes on you. Else, your back would tell the tale.

Danladi had been furious because you had been elevated to a higher prefectural rank—to the office of Senior Prefect, the SP. He had chased prefects resident in Koshoni hostel away from their cabins to the regular rooms of Omatshola hotel. We were all aware of the perks that came with staying in those comfortable cabins. Danladi knows too. So he chased prefects in Koshoni hostel away from their cabins a day before you were to move into the statutory SP cabin in Koshoni hostel.

"They cannot impose any Nyamiri on me," a friend of yours had told you

Danladi had said, alluding to you. You'd stayed away from Koshoni hostel because of this. You stayed put in Omatshola hostel.

Becoming SP wasn't something you had wanted. The school had thrust the position into your hands because of the urgent need to fill the vacuum created after Bode, the erstwhile SP, had been relieved of his SP duties with ignominy. Bode slapped the son of a naval Rear Admiral! The boy went partially deaf. Bode was consequently disgraced before the entire school and suspended for an entire month.

Thereafter, the Executive officer sent for you, and said, "The SP position is void. You'll occupy the office."

You had been shocked. The words to reject the position didn't come to you.

You said nothing in reply save for "Aye sir."

The Executive Officer said, "You'll assume duty immediately." His final words haunted you. For some reason, you were scared. This was despite the fact that you were the most feared prefect in the school.

Later, Danladi learnt of your ascent. He visited Omatshola hostel, looking for you. He mustered all prefects in Omatshola. You were absent. You were hiding in one of the toilets by Mike and November Divisions. Danladi sent you a message, asking you to muster later in the day. You flouted his order, caring less about the repercussions.

□

You hear footsteps. Someone has entered the hostel. And you're eating breakfast: cornflakes in a small cup. You don't know who walked into the hostel. It had better not be one of the Naval ratings on the lookout for students evading parade.

You down your breakfast in five gulps. Then you come out of your room. The person who entered into the hostel appears to be in one of the rooms in Mike Division.

You tilt your head a little, looking straight down the corridor of Mike Division. Someone in a white and blue uniform is visible. But that's not the uniform of Naval rating, much less that of a Naval officer. It's a Navy boy's uniform. So you confront the person. It's a subordinate. "What are you doing here?"

"I was sent to call you, Sah."

"Call me? By whom? And is this my cabin?"

"I wanted to drink some water, Sah. I was going to go to your room afterwards."

A thought pops up in your head. Danladi. You hope he's not the one who had sent for you.

"Who sent you?" you ask.

"Mr Agboola. He said you should come to the parade ground right away."

"Alright. Be fast and leave," you say.

Mr Agboola is the teacher coordinating the Drug Awareness club. Agboola had enrolled you for the annual essay competition. He told you a week ago that you took the second place.

□

A smile forms on your face as you hurry to the parade ground. A Navy boy has never won the Drug Awareness essay competition. You are the first. And now the entire school would know this.

The Vice Principal Academic mounts the platform on the parade ground, and says, "A brilliant Navy boy represented the school in an essay competition." Your face lights up. You are standing by the SS 3 ranks. You nudge Bola, your classmate. Bola nods. He nudges you back. Navy boys are already murmuring your name.

They know who the Vice Principal speaks of. No one else could possibly win something so grand.

“Olisemeke Osademe.”

Your heart pauses for a microsecond. Then it begins to pound your chest again. You square your shoulders as you walk to the platform, to stand before the entire student body as a role model.

But it is not long before you sight Danladi. He is scowling. His ebony face seems darker than it is, or used to look. There is a tribal mark on his right cheek or what it a scar?

You look away. The Vice Principal offers you a handshake. You accept it, along with the plaque and the wristwatch you won. Navy boys applaud you across class ranks. You beam. No one realises how good you feel about yourself, or so you think. You feel like an eagle, soaring high in the azure skies, above everyone else, no one capable of touching you.

□

One person dares to touch you. Danladi. He stops you at the roundabout, by the Guidance and Counselling Unit, on your way to take a photograph with members of staff, the photograph that would grace the front page of *The Olumo Pipes*, the school magazine.

“Idiot,” he says in his Hausa accent, “I mustered you and you didn’t show up. You dare to defy me. I will show you that I was in the Kaduna Riot. And I saw blood. Nyamiri!” He glares at you. His glower makes you jittery.

You mull over on his words. The Kaduna Riot. You’re not sure of what he meant. But you suspect that it has something to do with the seemingly unresolved

conflict between the Hausa and the Igbo. And then the last word he uttered—Nyamiri. That word was a bit familiar. You’ve heard a Hausa man spit it on an Igbo person with disdain. But you’re not Igbo, you think. You’re from Delta. You only share their fair skin.

“Whose business?” you say to yourself. It’s your moment; you’re not willing to let Danladi steal it. You move to the roundabout. The school photographer is waiting. You pose. School officials rally around you. The Vice Principal drapes his arm over your shoulder. You’re sporting a big smile. Danladi is watching. You can see him from the corner of your eye. Yet you ignore him, whilst accolades are flying around you from different directions, from different mouths, from both teachers and students alike.

In a few minutes the show draws to a close. “Hei,” you hear Danladi call after you. Danladi is mumbling something in Hausa to Aminu, his superior, a Lieutenant Commander.

“Double down.”

You’re reluctant to double down. Your new status as SP exalts you above such; the SP should be held in high esteem at all times. Nonetheless, you double down. You do not want to complicate the situation which, invariably, is about to get ugly.

Danladi continues to mumble incoherent phrases to Aminu. You scarcely recognise any word he utters, except Nyamiri. In five minutes you’re told to lie down flat on the red soil, though your shirt is white. You look at the red ground with cracked veins and decaying leaves. You gasp. *Why should you lie down?* You’re defiantly poised. Still you lie down.

Danladi breaks a thin stem from the Gmelina tree under which he stands. He strips it of leaves.

“Stand up.”

You jump up.

“Touch your toes.”

You hesitate.

“Sir, I did nothing,” you say. You are suddenly bold.

Danladi recoils. His eyes shone like red-hot coal. He glances at Aminu. He shifts his gaze back to you. Your heart thumps hard as you try to envisage what would happen next. Danladi’s palm lands on your face with a thud. You stagger.

Everything goes flashes before your eyes. Then you regain your eyesight.

“Dan iska...shege!” Danladi shouts. He whips your back. You don’t flinch. For some reason, you become dead to pain.

Navy boys watch from a few yards away. You see them watching. You can’t see the Vice Principal, though you see some concerned teachers also watching. They don’t intervene. They don’t come to plead on your behalf. You’re all alone, enduring the nasty turn of circumstances.

“Hunch,” Aminu says. You want to be defiant. But you can’t. Not to Aminu. He’s one of the NDA-trained officers in the school, having undergone five years of intense military training, unlike the nine months people like Danladi spent.

You squat. You frog-jump around the parade ground. Your heart pounds in your rib cage. Your shirt is soaked in sweat. And your socks are brown. Your breathing gradually becomes belaboured.

It seemed your outgrown Childhood  
Asthma had returned.

After two round trips of frog-jump, you’re not told to stop. Your head ascends and descends as you lift your feet above the ground and return it back in your crouching position. Your hamstring and calf muscles cramp, tears start to form in your eyes. You want the ground to open up and swallow you. You continue to frog-jump.

On completion of the third round trip, Danladi says, “Stop! Double down to here.” You stand up gingerly. Your legs are heavy as you try to move them forward. You flounder as you walk toward Danladi and Aminu. You see smirks on their faces. Danladi seems self-satisfied. He is saying something to Aminu.

“When I muster you next time, you muster. You hear? You red Nyamiri. Don’t ever try me again,” says Danladi to you. “See how red you look. How can someone be this red? In fact, muster in front of my house after school hours.”

You are released thereafter. As you proceed to your classroom you ruminate. Should you muster, or should you not? Your gait is unsteady. The word Nyamiri comes up in your head. You’re offended by that word. You decide not to muster. You’re not mindful of what lies ahead. To hell with Danladi! □



## What's in a Name?

Dike Chukwumerije interviewed  
by Akumbu Uche

Saraba's editorial staff interviews a leading light in contemporary Nigerian poetry

Dike Chukwumerije is known primarily for his poetry but he is also an accomplished novelist and essayist and has produced a total of eight books of which his 2008 literary debut, *The Revolution Has No Tribe*, is arguably the most widely read.

In August 2012, I met with him at the Salamander Café in Abuja where, over drinks, he spoke to me extensively about names, the appeal they hold for him, the burdens of having a famous name and even, how names can help unite the African continent.

Here is an edited transcript of that interview.

□ Akumbu Uche

**AKUMBU UCHE:** You are the author of, among others, a book of poetry called *Ahamefula: the Cultural Significance of Names Amongst the Ibos*. From that title, it's fair to assume that you are fascinated by names.

**DIKE CHUKWUMERIJÉ:** Yes, I do have a fascination with names. I think it is part of an African worldview. I believe people's names are important and can be a source of strength and inspiration through their years and could even be equated to what their parents' hopes and dreams were for them when they were born. I also believe that names are a receptacle of information and history. Sometimes they tell you the socioeconomic, political or cultural circumstances of the time that you were born. So in all those senses, I think names are quite important. I am fascinated by them – why they are given, what they mean, and things like that.

**AU:** Let's talk about your own name which in full is Dikeogu Egwuatu Chukwumerije. What were your parents' hopes and expectations for you?

**DC:** In one word, Dikeogu means 'a warrior' and Egwuatu means 'someone who is not afraid'. When I was growing up, I was very proud of that name, seeing as it means 'fearless warrior'. Even though I am not an aggressive kind of person, I have inner strength and although I have fears, I am not afraid to face them and I can take the heat. So, my name has been quite apt for me and has

helped me in various times in my life to go out there and get things done.

My parents had a way of giving us heroic names. I think they consciously wanted to stir us up to believe that we could achieve more. For instance, my elder brother was called Che after Che Guevara and another brother was called Kwame after Kwame Nkrumah. Another one is called Chaka, after Chaka the Zulu and yet another is called Chikadibia. So, I think they gave us strong names so that we could be strong people. It's almost like giving your children philosophical foundations in their own names.

**AU:** So basically, in Igbo culture, the naming of children is not taken lightly.

**DC:** No, it's not. I am not an expert on Igbo culture by a long shot, but from my own interaction and personal observation, I can say that it's not taken lightly at all. It's not just the Igbo culture; I think it is an African thing. People fast and pray, consult and ask [around] before they name a child. People actually believe that when you name a child, you set his destiny, and it does have some truth in it because there is a strong tendency to become what you are called even though in the long run, it is up to your own free will – you can always change your name and your personality – but parents do believe that what they call their children can set a course for them in life and so they give it a lot of thought.

**AU:** As a father, how did you handle that responsibility when it came to naming your own children?

**DC:** My wife and I, we thought, prayed and talked a lot about it. We wanted to give them names that would say, “We thought about this name and your name is special and there's a message in your

name. This is our heart towards you and this is who we believe you are.”

My first daughter is called Nonimemma, which means ‘persevere in doing the right thing’. Because she was our first, we wanted to give her a strong and unique name, that we felt nobody else had. My second daughter is called Malaika and in Swahili, it means ‘angel’. We gave her that name for so many reasons. The literal meaning, ‘messenger of God’ suggests someone who has a purpose. We also called her Malaika because we wanted to give her a sense of Pan-Africanism and enlarge her worldview just as my dad had done with the names he had given us.

**AU:** You posit that foreign names can expand a child's worldview but don't you think we have an obsession with foreign names that can sometimes be negative?

**DC:** Definitely – if you are doing it out of a sense of inferiority or if you have the belief that ‘theirs is better’ then, it's something to worry about. But if you are doing it as a way of building bridges across cultures, then I think it's something to be encouraged. I truly and honestly believe that all the differences between human beings are just political, there is really no difference. I don't have any problem with you taking a name from any culture; it's all about your mindset.

That sense of Pan-Africanism is important. The walls between Lagos and Cotonou are higher than the ones between Lagos and London and it's not just a theoretical problem; one of the reasons why we are such a poor and undeveloped continent is because we simply do not try to build bridges.

You know, I think one of the reasons why the Western cultures appear to be dominating is because they have made what they have assimilable by everybody. But when you come to Africa, the Igbo culture belongs to Igbo people and nobody else can ever have it. If you try to take it, they say, “No, you’re not Igbo indigenously”. But the English culture now belongs to the whole world and that is why it’s conquering the world because it’s opened its arms and said anybody can be English. I don’t see anything wrong in saying everybody can be Igbo or Yoruba because culture is learned - it’s not attached to your DNA. I think people should be free to borrow from any culture they see anything positive in.

**AU:** Let’s go back to names. Literal and figurative meanings aside, they sometimes come with certain associations. Take your last name for instance. When people hear the name, Chukwumerije, they think: Biafra, Nigerian politics, Olympic medalist, and of course National Poetry Slam champion. How does it feel to bear such a heavy name?

**DC:** This is a difficult thing to talk about because in Nigeria, to have a well-known name is to have many negative stereotypes immediately associated with you. People often think, “You are the son of a ‘big man’ and so you are an irresponsible person” or “Everything you have, it’s because of who your father is”. Sometimes, you never know if people actually see you for who you are or as access to that other person; if they are genuinely making friends with you or if they see you as a means to an end for themselves.

My dad has been part of the Nigerian political landscape for a long time, before

I was even born. Some people hate him, some love him, some are suspicious of him and all of that immediately comes to you because you bear that name, and growing up, you learn to deal with all of that. But luckily, we had a very normal childhood and we grew up just like any other [Nigerian] kid because our parents went out of their way to make sure that we had no sense of grandeur or entitlement. It is a heavy name, yeah, and obviously because it is such a high profile name, you have to be careful about what you do so you don’t end up in the headlines – the Senator’s son said this or the Olympian’s brother did that - but that has never been a problem for me. At the end of the day, it is my name just like your name is your name.

**AU:** You’re obviously comfortable with your name but did you ever, maybe at the start of your writing career, want to change it?

**DC:** I did think about writing under a pseudonym so that I could be freer, if you like, to say controversial things and get away with it. But then, it’s my name and I said to myself, why should I change my name? Whatever has gone on in the past, it’s not my fault. Whoever I’m associated with, I did not choose it. This is what I was born with, for good or bad, advantages or disadvantages. And then, I’m also interested in continuing my family’s legacy because we have done a couple of positive things and I’m interested in having the name built up. In my own opinion the way to preserve a legacy is to add to it so if I stay where I am and I succeed in what I’m doing, it will only enhance the name. It doesn’t just belong to my dad or my brother; it’s also my name.

**AU:** We have established that you are a Pan-Africanist but this book, *Ahamefula*,

which is preoccupied with Igbo names, is not.

**DC:** I had written a poem called 'Ahamefula' and so much came out of it that after writing, I was intrigued and I thought, Wow, this is really interesting how you could get so much out of a name. I'd really like to write a collection like this. And then, the Igbo culture is the one I know. I didn't want to go and take someone else's culture and not really be able to interpret the names. So, that was just the way it happened.

**AU:** And you picked 50 names.

**DC:** It sounded like a good number.  
[Laughs]

**AU:** Some of the featured names like Nnamdi and Uloma are pretty standard Igbo names while some like Utoakalandu and Okwesilieze are not so common. What were you going for?

**DC:** Well, first of all, a lot of Igbo names have Chi-this, Chi-that and I wanted to avoid all the Chi-names - essentially, they are about God and I didn't necessarily want to write about God. I picked names from my own village and some of the names we have are not very common. Like Utoakalandu - it's the name of one of my ancestors and I just thought that

that was such a powerful name and then Okwesilieze, after [former governor] Okwesilieze Nwodo, is a name I have always liked.

Again, at the back of my mind, I just wanted to introduce Igbo people to a wider range of names and the concept of creating new names. We don't have to keep recycling the old names; we can use the language a bit more imaginatively.

**AU:** How about your non Igbo readers; what would you like them to take away from the book?

**DC:** The power of a name and the amount of depth that a name can have. Remember, these names are also the titles of the poems so they can either enjoy it just as a poetry collection or for the philosophies behind the poems; and all these attitudes are transferable - I'm sure Nnamdi or Urichindere would have Yoruba and Hausa equivalents. Even though I used Igbo names as examples, the essence of this is to showcase, to celebrate the African naming culture. □

*Daily Life in Algeria*  
**Jeroen Evers**











## *It Is Runonko Time*

**Brian Bwesigye**

It is time to collect, build, burn, smash,  
clear, cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

We gather particles of soil, the ones we call  
ebinombi.  
We gather dry stalks of wambuwa.  
We use sticks to gather potatoes from gardens  
that are not ours.  
It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear,  
cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

I am to build the runonko, so, I aim for the  
stronger binombi.  
Rutebarika is to gather wambuwa; sometimes he  
brings other dry sticks, the smaller eucalyptus  
branches that have fallen off.  
Kariisa is to bring potatoes, but he is barred from  
going to our gardens.  
It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear,  
cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

Rutebarika comes first and finds me half way up  
the small house that I am building.  
He says the door I have put is small, so I  
dismantle everything.  
Kariisa comes before I start rebuilding, he brings  
with him a heavy harvest of potatoes and we  
decide to build together.  
It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear,  
cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

We put the bigger binombi on the base, after  
digging a small depression in the ground.  
Then we put the smaller binombi, the door is  
wide enough for several sticks to fit at once, so  
we put the sticks.  
Now, we just need a fire.  
It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear,  
cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

A wambuwa stick rubbing against a stone, or a  
stone rubbing against a stone, we have the fire.

We light up our house of binombi, the sticks are now burning.

Just after the sticks have burnt out we put the potatoes through the same door, making sure they fit in the small depression.

We smash the now hot binombi on top of the potatoes and then withdraw.

It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear, cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

Rutebarika goes to chase birds from their sorghum field, he will re-adjust the scare-crow by dressing it in a new coat.

Kariisa goes to check whether the goats have strayed while I go to check on my trap for moles in our sweet potatoes' garden.

It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear, cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

The mole, yes the efukuzi itself is there in the trap, with its two soiled teeth hanging out of its mouth and a stain betraying a stream of blood.

In excitement at the success of my trap, I whistle to my friends from the garden and field, we rush to our runonko, where we meet at almost the same time.

It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear, cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

Kariisa's dog keeps watching the kishuma trap, which is still holding the dead efukuzi by its neck.

We ignore the dog, and clear the soil we made out of the binombi.

We use sticks to avoid being burnt by the hot soil.

It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear, cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

The emondi are hot, like volcano lava.

We let some air blow away the heat and then light a new fire, so we can roast the efukuzi for Rukamba, Kariisa's dog.

It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear, cool and eat; It is Runonko Time.

The efukuzi does not have to roast well, burning hair does not smell sweet.

We throw the efukuzi at a safe distance,  
Rukamba follows its gift.  
We go to find our potatoes, now warm and not  
hot like before.  
We sit down, peel the potatoes with our bare  
fingers, and eat.  
It is time to collect, build, burn, smash, clear,  
cool and eat; It is Runonko Time. □

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"It Is Runonko Time" is a story from *Fables out of Nyanja*.  
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permission.

## *You Hum Tunes* Okoroafor Chibuzor

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You hum tunes  
radio gossip, moonward

As talking denudes art and nuance my dreams  
meteors scout a dance floor  
singeing faded blue jeans

You hum tunes, salt on cooked egg. □

# *A Beautiful Mind*

## Lara Daniels

I was the black girl dancing in the village square. Yes, the naked, black girl dancing in the village square.

Did you see me yesterday?

Did you at least hear about me?

I was the black girl dancing in the village square. Yes, the naked, black girl dancing in the village square.

I don't know how it started, but one moment, I was so sad that I thought to take my life. Just when I made to sink Papa's carving knife in my stomach, I laughed. I laughed so hard, tears streamed down my face. I tossed the knife away, tore off my clothes and ran into the square.

There were no beating drums. There were no playing harmonicas. The children clapped and hopped around me. The elders raised their hands to their chins and slowly wagged their heads as they passed by. Others rolled their eyes and snarled curses. The young men were so mean. They threw dirt at me and guffawed as they did so. But I paid them no heed. I shook my arms and stamped my feet all over the dry, unyielding earth as my body oozed out sweat under the hot sun.

My parents found me in the village square. They'd been looking for me, they said. But I doubt they searched thoroughly because if they had, they would have found me, right there in the center of our village. I was tired from all that dancing, so I sat on a small rock. Mama placed her hands on her head and wept when she saw me. Papa had no words. He wouldn't even look at me. His lips thinned, so I knew he was angry. Ashamed, I think. But I didn't care. What





mattered was that I'd danced in the village square.

They took me home and Papa left Mama to wash me. She clothed me, took me to the room at the back of the house and said, "You are not to leave this house again."

"But why?" I asked.

"You're sick, child," she said, her voice hoarse from her crying.

I touched my forehead; it wasn't hot. I shook my arms and my legs; they moved.

"I don't feel sick, Mama," I said.

Tears misted her eyes, and she gazed up towards heaven. "Your sickness is a strange one, my daughter," she said, facing me. "It's best you stay in the house from now on so you can get better."

She moved towards the door, and I sat down on my mat, wondering about what she'd said.

"Are you thirsty?"

I nodded.

She opened the door; her shoulders, drooping as she exited through it. That was when I saw him: The yellow man with a yellow hat, holding a yellow stick.

I should have shrunk back in fear; I'd never seen him before and didn't hear him come in. But I wasn't afraid. He smiled.

*So tall. So yellow.*

I smiled back.

He pointed his stick at me. "You are the girl that danced in the village square."

It wasn't a question, but still, I nodded. "They say I have a strange sickness. My father won't talk to me, and my mother doesn't want me going outside to play again."

The corners of his lips turned down and his brows knit together. "It's not a sickness," he said.

"It's not?"

"Ordinary people say it's a sickness. People like me, we call it beautiful."

"I don't understand."

"The gods have your mind, my daughter," he said. "You can now see things ordinary eyes cannot see, and hear things ordinary ears cannot hear. In ancient

times, the forefathers would have made you a priestess, serving only the gods of our land."

Mama walked in with a cup of water. She sauntered past Yellow man.

"What?" She raised one eyebrow and gave me the cup.

I drank the water and stared back at her. "Don't you see him?"

"Who?"

I pointed to Yellow man. "This man. This man standing here."

Her eyes followed the direction of my finger. "Which man?"

I pointed again, but Mama buried her face in her hands.

"There's nobody there," she sobbed.

"There's nobody there my daughter."

Yellow man shook his head slowly, gazed at the floor, then looked up at me. "I told you," his voice was quiet. "You can now see things nobody can see; hear things nobody can hear."

"Are you a ghost?" I asked.

"I'm not a ghost," Mama answered. She held my arms and shook me. "I'm here. I'm your mother."

"I wasn't talking to you Mama," I said. "I'm talking to Yellow man ...this yellow man here wearing a yellow hat."

Mama shook me again, but Yellow man smiled – a small pitying smile. I don't know who he pitied: me or mama. He wandered up to a wall, and slid through it.

I faced my mother. "Mama, I'm not sick."

Mama released my arms.

"Yellow man says I have a mind that belongs to the gods," I told her. "I see things you cannot see and I hear things you cannot hear."

Her eyes narrowed and she gave me a long stare. She collected the cup from my hand and strode to the door. "It's called madness, my daughter; a *very* strange kind of sickness."

She walked out, and bolted the door behind her. □



## *Gabon Space Elevator* **Némo Tral**

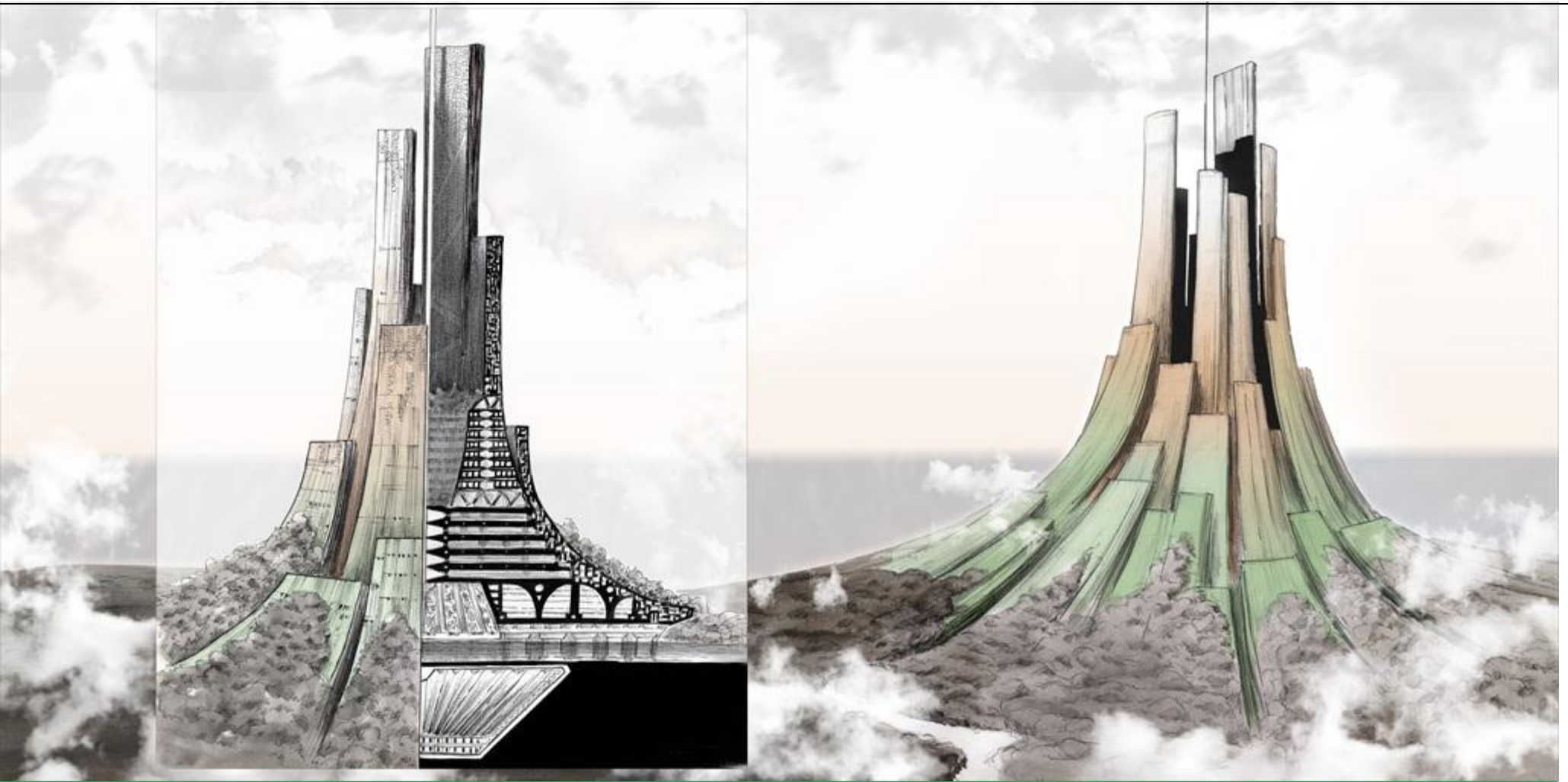
Tral imagines what it would be like  
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At the boundary between sea, land and space, the Space Elevator would become the World's Lighthouse, connecting Mankind to the immensity of interplanetary space.

**Face Me, I Book You:**  
***Writing Africa's Agency in***  
***the Age of the Netizen***  
**Pius Adesanmi**

Keynote lecture delivered at the African Literature Association Dallas, April 2012. Sponsored by the Graduate Students' Caucus of the African Literature Association (ALA)

I owe the title of this lecture partly to the Nigerian poet, Amatoritsero Ede, who recently “booked” a fellow Nigerian writer for “facing” him in a Facebook spat and, partly, to my favourite palm wine tapper in Isanlu, my hometown in Nigeria. Although Ede coined the brilliant expression, “Face Me, I Book You”, I think the greater debt is owed to my tapper. I call him my tapper extremely cautiously because he also tapped wine for my father for decades, becoming my tapper only after Dad passed on in 2007.

My palm wine tapper needs no introduction to you. You know him. He is an eponymous subject, still very much part of whatever is left of the bucolic Africa “of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs” which fired the imagination of David Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and others in the Négritude camp but irritated Wole Soyinka, Es'kia Mpahlele, and other opponents of Négritude’s “poupées noires” version of Africa to no end. You know him.

You know him because his craft is ageless and has defied the frenzied and chaotic wind of postmodernity blowing over Africa. Baba Elemu – that’s what we call a palm wine tapper in Yoruba – is still alive and kicking in towns and villages all over West Africa. Firoze Manji of Pambazuka once busted my West African monopolist bubble by telling me that they also know the palm wine tapper in East Africa. You know him.



You know him because the fruit of his labour episodically irrigates your tongue whenever summer research takes you to those parts of Africa where he still plies his trade. His black and rusty Raleigh bicycle, the ageless gourds and tired plastic containers attached to the rear end of the bicycle (carrier in Nigeria), all bubbling and foaming in the mouth, and the dark brown belt of reeds that has gathered mileage by taking his ilk up and down the trunk of palm trees since Obatala got drunk in the mythic process of creation, are all iconicities of a certain version of Africa that will just not go away. You know him.

In addition to this generic portrait, my own palmwine tapper is always a vital source of reconnection with my roots during summer vacations in my hometown. Connoisseurs of the matter at hand know only too well that nothing beats the early morning harvest, especially if it comes undiluted with water. That is why the palmwine tapper has to beat even the most auroral farmer to the belly of the bush. The palm tree knows how to reward the tapper who sets forth at dawn.

Whenever I'm home, the pact between my palmwine tapper and me ensures that he wakes me up around 6 am on his way back from the bush with my own reserved portion of "the usual". I suspect that one of his kegs was named for me or I was named for it as Achebe was named for Victoria, Queen of England. He filled it faithfully every morning and his "akowe, mo ti gbe de o" (Book man, I've brought your wine) was my muezzin's call to prayer. My mum would grumble that I now wake up to the call of palm wine. Whatever happened to the Pius she raised to wake up to the Angelus and morning mass?

I did not hear my tapper's call to prayer on this particular day in the summer of 2008. The jarring clang of TuFace Idibia's "African Queen" – I'm sure you all know that song – was what woke me up. One of my nieces

in the village had been kind enough to set the said song as my ringtone. Ladies and gentlemen, please sing with me: "You are my African queen/the girl of my dreams/you take me where I've never been". That was Idibia crooning in my cell phone. Who could be calling that early in the morning? I concluded that it must be some silly friend back in Canada or the US who'd forgotten the time difference between Nigeria and North America. I hissed and fumbled for my phone in the greyish darkness of the early morning and the voice that came from the other end made me jump up in bed.

"Akowe!"

"Akowe!"

That was my palmwine tapper phoning me – wait for this – from the bush! As I later found out when he returned from that morning's sortie, he was calling me from the neck of one of his trees. He wanted to let me know that delivery would be delayed that morning and I may not get my regular quantity of "the usual". Funny things had happened to his gourds. I understood. In the village, strange spirits disguised as villagers sometimes climbed trees to help themselves to the fruit of another man's labour. It was all part of the territory. I told him not to worry. I would accept whatever he was able to supply.

Then it hit me like a thunderbolt! The familiar and the strange. The uncanny. Try to imagine an elderly palm wine tapper atop a palm tree in the village, reaching for his pocket to fish out his blackberry in order to discuss the laws of supply and demand with a customer whose father he had also served decades earlier under a totally different economy of meanings and you will understand why that event, in the summer of 2008, marked a turning point in my attempts to fashion new ways of listening to so many new things Africa seems to be saying about her historical

quest for agency – a quest that has lasted the better part of the last five centuries .

I also began to think seriously about how the new economies of agency emanating from Africa pose serious challenges to the work of the imagination in the postmodern age of social media and immediate communication. In thinking along these lines, I haven't been too far away from the epistemological challenges which confronted another thinker, another place, another time. I am talking of Walter Benjamin's attempt to grapple with the rise of the image – film and photography – and its impact on the work of art in his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

The Age of Mechanical Reproduction? That's so dinosaur now! Perhaps you will agree with me that until a blackberry joined the arsenal of tools and implements that my palm wine tapper took atop his trees every morning in Isanlu, he belonged in a habitus of tradition governed by those mytho-ritualisms of existence which has led to tensions in the arena of historical discourses and counter-discourses about Africa's agency. My palm wine tapper *sans* his blackberry comes from the world we have come to associate with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* - especially the world as the people of Umuofia knew it before Obierika's famous metaphor of the rope and the knife – or Birago Diop's *Breath* – where we must "listen to things more often than beings" in order to hear the voice of fire, water, wind, and bush.

This is the world of cosmic equilibrium to which the poet persona in Abioseh Nicol's poem, "The Meaning of Africa", returns after ironically escaping the world of the cold northern sun which gave my palm wine tapper his blackberry. You will recall that after loving the sophistication of Dakar, Accra, Cotonou, Lagos, Bathurst, Bissau, Freetown, and Libreville, Abioseh Nicol's poet persona was advised to:

Go up-country, so they said,

To see the real Africa.

For whomsoever you may be,

That is where you come from,

Go for bush, inside the bush,

You will find your hidden heart,

Your mute ancestral spirit.

The story of agency as it relates historically to Africa is easy to narrate from this point. Europe encountered this Africa of "mute ancestral spirits" and "hidden hearts", called her horrible Conradianly dark names, and proceeded to deny her agency through a series of historical violations and epistemic violence, which bear no rehashing here. As disparate and contested as they have been, Africa's and her diaspora's epistemological responses to these violations have been fundamentally about the recovery of agency.

We named these responses Négritude, pan-Africanism, cultural nationalism, decolonization, just to mention those. In the process of articulating these robust responses, Wole Soyinka and Eskia Mphahlele may have gone after Senghor; Ali Mazrui and the Bolekaja troika may have gone after Wole Soyinka who, in turn, went after some of them as neo-Tarzanists; Mongo Beti may have gone after Camara Laye for publication of work not sufficiently anti-colonialist; and Obi Wali may have gone after English-language dead-enders, opening the door for Ngugi wa Thiong'o's decades-long crusade against Europhonists, I don't think that anybody would quarrel with my submission that these tensions and disagreements are more or less what the Yoruba would call the multiple roads leading to the same market.



That market is the recovery of the self, recovery of agency.

In the stretch of essays and books from “Dimensions of African Discourse” to *The African Imagination* and, lately, *The Négritude Moment*, Abiola Irele has done remarkable work mapping the evolution of and the tensions inherent in Africa’s counter discourses of self-recovery. Writing from a different philosophical perspective in the essay, “African Modes of Self Writing”, Achille Mbembe takes a somewhat dismissive tack absent from Irele’s work but nonetheless identifies three historical events – slavery, colonization, apartheid – as fundamental to the two currents of discourses and processes of self-recovery that he identifies as central to the question of agency: Afro-radicalism and nativism.

What is interesting for me – and I believe for numerous readers, critics, and followers of Mbembe – are the weaknesses he ascribes to both traditions of discourse in his attempts to problematize them. To Afro-radicalism, he ascribes a “baggage of instrumentalism and political opportunism” and to nativism he ascribes a “burden of the metaphysics of difference”. I wonder what my brother, Adeleke Adeeko, thinks of that particular critique nativism but I digress.

My reading of Mbembe’s essay has shifted over the years from a fundamental disagreement with his characterization and insufficient contextualization of Afro-radicalism and nativism to what I am beginning to think are gaps and silences in his critique of the African imagination. These gaps and silences pertain to the very nature of Africa’s agency even within the ideological politics and the economies of self-recovery in the African text. For we must ask: what sort of agency does Africa really acquire in Négritude and cultural nationalism? I am talking about the version of Africa which Chinua Achebe, Senghor, Birago Diop, Mongo Beti, Ferdinand

Oyono, and Abioseh Nicol rescued from Europe’s post-Enlightenment philosophers and colonialist writers. Which agency does Africa acquire in the texts of these *shons of the shoil*?

Which agency does my palm wine tapper acquire as he moved from Conrad to Achebe? I think his transition is a move from being silent and unspeaking in one textual world to being rescued but spoken for in another textual world. One world gives him to us in body parts, capable only of dialects or incomprehensive babble, tapping a horrible alcoholic brew consumed by lazy natives in irrational quantities, an activity he gets to perform only if he escapes poisonous snakes, lions, and hyenas. Another textual approach restores the cosmic harmony of his world, the ancestral dignity of his work, and treats his product, palm wine, as worthy of the elevated cultural registers and aesthetic apprehension that Africa’s violators would normally reserve for merlot, cabernet sauvignon, or pinot noir.

The flora, fauna, and seasons of his world, especially the palm tree, also become subjects of elevated aesthetic treatment. If, as Adam Gopnik, the Canadian essayist for *The New Yorker*, assures us in his Massey lectures, the Romantic imagination elevated winter and ice to art and aesthetics, Achebe and his contemporaries would do much more for the world of the palm wine tapper in their attempt to fully restore his agency. Don’t forget that harmattan and even the white froth and foam of palm wine became worthy elements of metaphorical constructions.

But the tapper is still spoken for in and by these texts. In at least one instance, he is upbraided for killing trees in his youthful exuberance. I am thinking here of a different version of the problematic that Linda Alcoff evinces in her well-known essay, “The Problem of Speaking for Others”. Race and gender are weighty

dimensions in Alcoff's treatise on the pitfalls of speaking for the native, the oppressed, or the gendered subject. What happens if Africa is the subject that is spoken for or represented, albeit in the ideological resistance mode of Afro-radicalism and nativism, by the privileged African intellectual, especially the writer?

African feminism's critique of Négritude's treatment of African woman and African womanhood provides part of the answer. We must all remember that Mariama Ba and her contemporaries, writers and critics alike, got tired of Négritude's constant conflation of Mother Africa and the mothers of Africa. Yet, in the beautiful and memorable lines such as "Négresse, ma chaude rumeur de l'Afrique" and "Femme noire, femme nue", the Négritude poet actually believed that he was conferring agency on his subject.

In his earlier cited essay, Mbembe approaches this part of the agency question in a manner which allows me to offer possible windows into the dilemmas of representing Africa's agency by writers in my generation. "Over the past two centuries," writes Mbembe, "intellectual currents have emerged whose goal has been to confer authority on certain symbolic elements integrated into the African collective imaginary."

I think my problem as an intellectual arose that morning in Isanlu when a momentary cognitive scission occurred and denied me the ability to "confer authority" on the intrusion of a symbolic element such as a blackberry into the imaginary of palmwine as I used to know it. It was immediately obvious to me that what was happening was beyond what could be explained by the usual recourse to the tradition-modernity binary, with the attendant intimations of how Africa negotiates modernity by gradually appropriating, domesticating, or integrating it within her own orders of experience.

From the top of his palm tree, my palmwine tapper was articulating his own agency and self-representing in ways that are miles ahead of the imaginaries which underwrite my work as a writer and critic. That, I posit, is the problem of African art in the current age of social media and MAC, my acronym for mutually assured communication. The fact that he phoned me from the top of a tree in the bush rattled and unsettled me. What if, God forbid, my Baba Elemu had also recorded videos of himself at work and posted it on youtube as these new possibilities of agency now afford him? What if he tweets his conversation with me from the top of that tree? What if he makes a photo of himself at work the cover of a Facebook page dedicated to tapping? What if... questions, questions, questions.

In a way, I think the writers of Négritude and cultural nationalism, escaped these dilemmas not because they shared coevality – or restored it where it was denied – with the palm wine tapper but because they operated as artists in the age of mechanical reproduction which, as revolutionary as it was, still allowed the possibility of a certain "inert" version of Africa that could be "rescued", "re-represented", and "spoken for" in their texts. My second submission is that this inert version of Africa, on behalf of whom Afro-radical and nativist discourses and praxes were articulated, now speaks for itself in ways that perpetually confound art and the imagination. Coping with an Africa which no longer needs your powers of metaphorical mediation to articulate novel forms of agency which have the added power of immediate global circulation is one of the most formidable dilemmas facing the generation of African writers, artists, and intellectuals to which I belong.

Chris Dunton and I have edited some special issues of journals in which we described these new writers, in the case of

Nigeria, as the third generation. That description of convenience has been vigorously challenged. My good friend, Abdourahman Ali Waberi, also a keynote speaker in this conference, has famously described that generation of writers as “les enfants de la postcolonie” in the case of our Francophone counterparts. Jacques Chevrier at some point was moving the idea of “migrature writers” but I haven’t followed the critical fortunes of that concept. Thanks mostly to the Nigerian members of this generation who have been winning bucket loads of international literary prizes – I am almost blushing with nationalistic pride here – the work produced by the children of the postcolony is now globally known and is the subject of numerous panels in conferences such as the ALA.

I am thinking of Helon Habila, EC Osondu, and my maternal cousin, Segun Afolabi, who have all won the Caine Prize. There is Chimamanda Adichie and, also, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, who did well in the Commonwealth competitions. There is Teju Cole, who recently won the Hemingway Prize here in the US. Oprah made the fame of Uwem Akpan and a hefty manuscript cheque confirmed Helen Oyeyemi’s arrival on the global literary scene. To these we must add other bright representations of new African writing, especially the novel, such as Binyavanga Wainaina, Monica Arac de Nyeko, Petina Gappah, Leonora Miano, Alain Mabanckou, Abdourahman Waberi, Dinaw Mengestu, Hisham Matar, and Ellen Banda-Aaku, my co-winner of the Penguin Prize for African Writing.

So, we have a cast of writers and a new writing that now whets critical appetites in international conferences. My concern is whether we are paying sufficient attention to the extraordinary dilemmas that these writers face in their attempts to write a continent which now possesses the ability to self-write, self-inscribe, and self-globalize even before the first sentence of

your novel, poem, or short story takes shape in your head. How do you write a continent which no longer lies inert to be rescued from misrepresentation? I saw hundreds of responses and counter-discourses from the African street to the Kony 2012 video before Teju Cole and Mahmoud Mamdani offered their famous responses. In Twitter and Facebook years, the writer and the scholar were light years behind the African street. To bring this dilemma back to my point of departure, how should this generation write my Blackberry-wielding, self-inscribing palmwine tapper? Reduce palmwine and Blackberries to conflicting metaphors and inscribe that conflict in flowery prose? That would be too simplistic.

Besides, there is a second problem. Those who wrote Africa’s agency in the age of mechanical reproduction never really had to deal with new forms of art that competed with and challenged the ontology of their respective mediums of expression. The novel, the short story, the poem, the play, and the painting didn’t have to worry too much about other forms of generic expression emerging at once as evidence of Africa’s new ability to self-represent and also as contending and competing forms of art. This lack of competition, if you ask me, partly accounts for why the scribal form of the African imagination, enjoyed an imperializing prestige over oral forms much to the consternation of colleagues like Karin Barber and Thomas Hale.

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s excellent novel, *I Do Not Come To You By Chance*, sadly, does not enjoy the luxury of not worrying about competition for its ontology as a form of art which seeks to represent a particular reality of post-SAP Nigeria in terms of its local and international dimensions. What do you do if you are writing a novel about what, for want of a better description, we must call Nigeria’s 419 letters and the imaginaries that have now come to be associated with

it, only to discover that those letters themselves are now being discoursed and critiqued as art forms on their own terms? Where the 419 letter now stakes a vigorous claim to an ontological identity as art, does a novel which ventures into its territory even merit the description of simulacrum? Which is the art representing what? It is almost now possible to claim that the 419 letter waiting in your mailbox as you listen to my lecture here is art representing the reality that is Nwaubani's novel. If your head is not spinning yet, please remember that some actors in Africanist scholarship here in North America have been very active in making a case for 419 emails as an art form worthy of critical reflection. I have received at least one solicitation in the past to help evaluate submissions to a planned special issue of a scholarly journal on 419 letters as a literary genre.

As I speak, the same argument is being made for the literary quality and generic integrity of tweets. In Canada, where I am based, the literary establishment seems to have made up its mind that the tweet is a literary work. Now, that's tricky because it makes every tweeter a potential writer just as a collection of somebody's Facebook status updates or 419 letters could give us a Nobel Prize for Literature down the road. If you look at the website of Canada Writes where the CBC organizes the prestigious CBC Literary Prizes, you'll be able to assess the considerable energy devoted to tweets and tweet challenges. Tweet is literature as far as Canada Writes is concerned.

The Nigerian writer, fiery critic, columnist, and cultural commentator, Ikhide Ikheloa, has been screaming himself hoarse about the need for African writing to face these new realities. Like Obi Wali, decades ago, Mr Ikheloa has been making very weighty pronouncements on the future of African writing. And he is arguing, among many pro-social media arguments that tweets, Facebook updates, and the associated

genres of the social media age, would leave African writers behind if we don't come up with imaginative ways to engage the forms of continental agency which they throw up. The way he sees it, social media is a significant part of the future of African writing and he has been warning that writers in my generation, especially those who remain social media stone agers, are in danger of extinction.

I take Mr. Ikhide's work extremely seriously and follow him religiously online. You should google him, follow him on Twitter, and add his blog to your daily reading. When he is not upbraiding African writers in the new generation for not taking the full measure of the possibilities of the social media revolution for our work, he is making very valid points in terms of the contributions of social media to even our own agency as writers.

Let me explain my understanding of Ikhide's position. Errors of interpretation would be mine. I think the debate about which audience the African writer ultimately writes for is further complicated for my generation by the mediators who stand between our work and our audiences. A measure of that is how much of Africa we still literally translate or italicize in the actual process of writing. Go to any Nigerian novel and see what happens with registers and diction depicting the actualities of youth experience, counterculture, and postmodern citiness for instance.

Paraga, mugu, maga, yahoozee, aristo, shepe, etc, all capture experiences which the Nigerian writer in my generation italicizes to mark their strangeness and otherness. Yet, Western writers using other Englishes in Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, don't always feel compelled to capture local experiences in italics. Just last month, Elizabeth Renzetti, a Canadian columnist writing for the *Globe and Mail*, had this to

say about the extensive registers of drunkenness in England:

“The English have more words for drunk than the Inuit have for snow, perhaps because it is as much part of the landscape. On a given night, you might be bladdered, legless, paralytic or rotten with drink...I thought I’d heard them all until British Home Secretary Theresa May used the phrase “preloaded” on Friday to announce her government’s war on binge drinking. Preloading refers to the act of getting hammered before you go out to get hammered – that is stocking up on cheap booze from the grocery store in order to be good and wobbly by the time you hit the bars.” – Elizabeth Renzetti

“Bladderred, legless, preloaded – all registers of English drunkenness. Would a British writer in my generation Italicize these experiences specific to his own

people in a creative work? You guess is as good as mine. “Stop Italicizing Africa!” Ikhide screams at writers in my generation all the time on Facebook. “Stop writing Africa for your literary agents, publishers, editors, marketers, and Western liberals”, Ikhide screams. Perhaps Ikhide already suspects that there is a reason why Salman Rushdie and Paulo Coelho – more international writers are following their example – have quietly migrated a great deal of their art, celebrity, and mystique to Facebook. “If your handlers insist on an Italicized Africa, take your agency to social media and engage the world freely”, Ikhide screams at African writers.

I hope I am not the only one who takes Ikhide extremely seriously.

I thank you for your time. □

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\* *Face Me, I Book You: Writing Africa's Agency in the Age of the Netizen* is a Guest Blog Post on Ikhide R. Ikheloa's blog, [www.xokigbo.wordpress.com](http://www.xokigbo.wordpress.com)

**For Pius Adesanmi:**

# Do We Still Have Postcolonialism? Kenneth W. Harrow

A distinguished professor of English at Michigan State University pays homage to Professor Pius Adesanmi's muse – and delivers a rigorous examination of Binyavanga Wainaina's book, *One Day I Will Write About This Place*.

About a year ago Biodun Jeyifo told me of a conversation he had with one of his Ph.D. students. She had come to his office in a panic, informing him that her advisor had told her that retaining postcolonialism in her project would only hinder her job search, and that it ought not to play a significant role in her dissertation. We were in the throes of asking where the profession was going, how global studies have now become sine qua non for those seeking to teach non-Western literatures. The fragile place of African literary studies was once again called into question: what would it belong to now? And for those wishing to study and teach it, where would it figure in a job application? BJ straightened out the student and her advisor, but we remain confronted with the issue as “World Literature” has become widely adopted as the rubric under which the students of non-Western literatures are asked to become “expert.”

The study of African literature within the academy has moved from an original Areas Studies approach to a contemporary World Literature approach. We should begin by asserting that both approaches are so seriously flawed as to call into question the very inclusion of African literature in the curriculum, if that is the only way it is to be taught.

For Area Studies, the risk lies in imposing a vision of Africa created by an



underlying anthropology of the early 20th century. It called for understandings generated by experts in indigenous cultures and languages, and which identified native values which informed cultural texts and gave them meaning. This is the true curse not only of Orientalism in African dress, but of authenticity detectives who prescribe the attributes of what is essentially frozen cultural truths for people viewed as natives, that is, objects for experts, rather than as subjects with subjectivity.

For Global Studies, the notion is equally pernicious. World Literature flattens out all cultures in the quest to find universal patterns of thought and creativity, and even more, to accept as representative texts those whose self-reflexive, postmodern postcolonial markers are highlighted within the stylistics of the current Creative Writing University Curriculum.

The former approach dignifies its knowledge under that heading of Objectivity as the quality that provides it with its claims to truth. The latter dignifies its value under the heading of Subjectivity as the value that enhances its aesthetic claims to universal worth. The former can be said to sell the value of education; the latter to sell books and movies. Both ultimately displace a global south perspective by privileging the dominant flows of global north ethnoscapings and financescapings.

Figures that give us access to the issues involved in moving toward our contemporary situation might be seen in the cell phone of Pius Adesanmi's palm winner tapper. In Binyavanga Wainaina's memoir it is his use of the term *kimay* and a disk of *benga* music.

Wainaina ends his recent, hot memoir, *One Day I Will Write about This Place* (2011) by referring to the creation of a new Anglo-Kenyan culture, and to a noteworthy CD and documentary on benga music. He evokes how it corresponds to what he calls the sounds of languages without the languages; how it relates to a new world context for Kenyans of today, one without the past.

World literature and world music are now manifestations of Jameson's definition of postmodernism as a cultural moment so fixated on the present as to erase any grounding in the past, occluding history from our readings, and resulting in what he calls pastiche. It is a view of culture as reduced to the bits and tracks of a video and cd.

Wainaina speaks English, and sees Anglo-Kenyan as the new identity being created at independence. He also speaks Swahili, and thus fits with the audiences of the two Kenyan radio stations he had when growing up. General Service is anglicized, like the Muslim singer Abdul Kadir Mohammed who changes his name to Kelly Brown and sings world pop. The other station, at the bottom of the dial, is National Service which is reserved for local languages. English is the official language of Kenya. Swahili is the national language, the less prestigious one. Wainaina speaks both these, but not his father's language, Gikuyu, nor his mother's Bafumbira. He doesn't speak any ethnic language, any local language—only a world language and a world pop language.

Wainaina has a term for incomprehensible Kenyan languages, languages the sound of which hurt his head when he was young, and that is *kimay*. Now that he has become a world literature author, teaching at Bard, he



returns to the term kimay at the end of the book to find in it something new: a language that subtends all Kenyan languages. He calls it “people talking without words, exact languages, the guitar sounds of all Kenya speaking Kenya’s languages” (253).

Adesanmi has a figure that subtends all Nigerian communication as well, and it is the cell phone, the one his palm-wine tapper uses to call him from his tree, early in the morning. Like kimay the cell phone speaks to all Nigerians, and in fact, reaches across the bush to the village to the worldweary author whose English has brought him to Carleton University in Canada where he is a professor. He is also winner of the Penguin Prize for African Writing in non-fiction.

Wainaina, too, occupies a privileged position as director of the Chinua Achebe Center for Writers and Artists at Bard College and has won the Caine Prize for African Writing. Both are writers whose works occupy the spaces of World Literature, and whose points of subjective reference are often local, that is, with local music, local languages.

This takes us to the global, whose relationship to the local has now supplanted the earlier area studies grounding in the regional, in the “area” to be studied. Studying an area implied learning the language and customs of the people, staying there long enough to become expert in the culture, and returning to write the book about them. This remains the dominant form of scholarship still today.

The rule of experts, as Timothy Mitchell termed it, produced orientalism and area studies forms of knowledge. The rule of the global airwaves, of

Appadurai’s technoscapes and ethnoscapescapes is now inseparable from capital’s financescapescapes, with the result being not simply a global culture, but more especially global pop cultures.

The global pop has two sides to it: the close and the distant. I will characterize the former as marked by global pop subjectivity and the latter by global pop objectivity. For the global pop subject, it is necessary to bring the reader close to the intimate spaces of the writer. For Wainaina this is not as easy as it would seem since his home languages are English and Swahili. He has termed the current pop scene Anglo-Kenyan, and identifies the music on General Service radio as “ageless and ours” (247), the “ours” referring to the Anglo-Kenyan scene. National Service radio, with “all those songs in so many languages that suggest some other pungent reality,” is marked by the two defining characteristics of the personal and subjective in his book, “mess and history” (247). He distinguishes the two types of music by their look, stating that the “Anglo-Kenyan garden does not look like that music [National Service music] sounds” (sic 248).

Thus the General Service example of the pop global singer whom he cites is Kelly Brown, aka Abdul Kadir Mohammed. If Michael Jackson could change his nose and his look, as a global pop icon, Kelly Brown could change his ethnic and religious name, as well as his home language from Mombasan Swahili to global English, with lyrics that go, “Me and my baby to-nite-ah, we hold each other tite-ah,” with the appropriate global spellings “nite” and “tite,” punctuated with ah.

We are at the objective distance needed for the pop song to be played on

the world market labels now, far from the young Wainaina's libidinal, intimate spaces. When his writing is on a roll, he jump-cuts from the recollection of those earlier times, to his present memories, where the earlier inhibitions that would have kept his masturbations secret have now yielded to the exigencies of Caine Prize writing. We are treated to the close confidences that focus on his "hard-on" and need to "LOOK AWAY from all breasts" (248), before he returns his to his reminiscences on National Service music, which he identified as having "*kimay sounds*" that he tried his best to avoid.

This binary replicates the familiar global paradigm of global/local that is replicated throughout the academy. And it is oriented completely from the perspective of the global north. Pop means different things in the global north and south; ethnic and local have totally different meanings. For instance, when the U.S. State Department presents its annual report on human rights in all countries around the world, among the topics the desk officers have to address is Anti-Semitism. Even for countries that have no Jews. The agenda crafted in the economies of the global north are for a global village constructed in an imaginary that utilizes a certain notion of diversity, constructing global slots for universalscapes that make no sense in a world where one is raised on National Radio music, speaking any of the local languages. Appiah's cosmopolitan and Wainaina's Anglo-Kenyan don't speak of being divided, say between a mother tongue and a fatherland, but rather of joining them in hybrid fashion. Where does Anglo squeeze into the local paradigms of benga music? The global will find a way.

So Wainaina posits a third human being—one that exists in some sense beyond the scope of the radio station perspectives. He identifies that third type with people who exist in "books," by which he means, those whom we identify with through written words instead of visual images. He says they don't have an actual voice, and that "you cannot see them" (249), but they "move around your head" (249).

No sooner has he given us those figures of imaginary substance than he evokes his youthful vision that someday the dungeons will be open and the truth will emerge. That truth he could only sense as they played Michael Jackson's "Human Nature," brimming "in compassion for his sensitivity"—the beautiful Michael Jackson, he calls him," where "the nose has not yet fallen." His world was inhabited by viewings of *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and *Fallen Crest*, a postmodern world with "a perpetual present tense: no lineage, no history" (249). In that world, one that simultaneously gives us "shoulder pad dreams" and prisoners whose "testicles are crushed," we are given to understand that the Anglo-Kenyan subject is formed—emergent into the eruption of late modernity that is marked by the global writer as having occurred yesterday in his memoir.

Wainaina is the other to those whose call their "father's house" home, Appiah's notion being something Wainaina and his sister Ciru never knew. In referring to pop lyrics in the song calling out to the people of Taita, he writes, "These short lyrics are a call home that I don't know, that Ciru does not know. We do not know how to be from two nations: home home (home squared, we call it, your clan, your home, the nation of your origin), and the home

away from home—the home of the future, a not yet place called Kenya. We are Milimani kids [from a well-to-do neighborhood], speaking English and Swahili” (51).

Everything comes into focus when considering this dual temporal track of then and now. Global pop objectivity is crafted by the writer who situates us alongside him in a room in Red Hook where he writes his memoir. We learn all we need to know when he evokes his tears in recounting his experience at a reading at Williams College. We know, too; we were there. Bard, Williams, where are we now—Philadelphia or is it New Haven? Tomorrow it will be Amherst or maybe Berkeley. The New Kenya of today that he describes belongs to all of us now, especially as we have access to his emotions when he observes voting for a new constitution in a Kenya that is “suddenly all soft and gooey. People smiling, looking you in the eye and saying mushy things like ‘as a Kenyan...’ or ‘in this New Kenya’” (251). We move with complete ease between the objective world of that New Age Globe and the writer’s evocation of his own years of “soft-focus trash” (251) when he tells us that he has learned he will need an operation to correct his vagueness!

The trope on which this figure of the global will coalesce is, ironically, world music. Here it is called *benga*, a music he can now access, like a music video, on CD, and whose meaning he can grasp with the documents that accompany the disk. *Benga*, the original, authentic, World Music tape of what had once been pre-colonial Kenyan nyatiti and orutu music, uses stringed musical instruments that Wainaina, our guide now, identifies as having “a wooden bow and string rubbing a fiddle made from a gourd”

(251). It was in the absence of those instruments that Kenyan soldiers during World War II fashioned a substitute with the use of a Spanish acoustic guitar.

He tells us the guitar recreated the sounds of home, but did so by subordinating the music to the language, and most of all by ignoring the original qualities of the instrument, using it “with impunity,” so as to express, in poor simulation, the “noble *nyatiti* and the noble *orutu*” (252). Using these new, reterritorialized global sounds, Olima Anditi and John Ogara created “a whole new idea” (253). [1]

Tracking the musical instrument back to the nyatiti and orutu would be the work of the area specialist. Transforming it into the final and central trope of this memoir is to refigure the instrument in World Literary terms. It is to situate *kimay* and Michael Jackson in the same breath as figurations of a global subjectivity that is marked by its contemporary worlding. There is no more ethnicity in its language; it is Youssou Ndour singing in English; Fela recreated on Broadway; Soyinka and Achebe monumentalized before their passing to the point that *Things Fall Apart* and *Death and the King's Horseman* have become so completely integrated into the current curriculum that their original language, which we might as well call African, has become reinscribed into that most powerful marker of the economy in culture, World Literature. That is now a language without native speakers: it is called a global language, and its speakers reproduce the sounds of all languages in its form.

Wainaina calls that language *kimay*, that is, people talking without words or exact languages, “the guitar sounds of all of Kenya speaking Kenya’s languages”

(253). His memoir speaks the language of all world languages, situated as it is in the context of the global, and it functions exactly as he sees the function of *kimay* as inserting its speakers into a globalized world. “For *kimay* was part of a project to make people like us certain of our place in the world, to make us unable to see the past and our place in it. To make us a sort of Anglo-Kenyan” (253). [iii]

This is where we have come from the original explorers who discovered the Dark Continent, who gave us its mysteries, and whose authentic language of expression Ngugi tried to protect with his famous injunction to write in African languages. The only problem now is how to locate that language when everything has become *kimay*. [iii]

□

Pius Adesanmi’s hot new essay is called “*Face Me, I Book You: Writing Africa’s Agency in the Age of the Netizen*.” Pius speaks English, Nigeria’s official and national language; he also speaks pidgin, its world pop language. In his essays he often utilizes Yoruba terms and sayings, and grounds his approach in Yorubanness, as in the local. He says, “we say this,” and cites a Yoruba term and concept.

In order to evoke his sense of the global world order within which we now live, he evokes, in hilarious terms, the figure of his palm-wine tapper with a cell phone. Not wishing to overdo the immodesty of proclaiming his relationship with the palm-wine tapper in too proprietary a fashion, he informs us that it is actually his father’s palm-wine tapper, but that with the passing of his father the tapper has continued his family relationship by providing the son with the bubbly brew.

One early morning before dawn Pius is awakened by the sound of his cell phone ringing. In a semi-awakened fog he imagines it is some friend from Stateside or Canada who has lost track of the time difference, and has inadvertently disturbed his sleep. To his great surprise, it is his palm-wine tapper who is calling to inform him that someone had gotten to the tree before him and tapped out the desired brew. He is called Akowe, book man, by the tapper, whose call is described thus:

“Akowe!”

Akowe!”

That was my palmwine tapper phoning me – wait for this – from the bush! As I later found out when he returned from that morning’s sortie, he was calling me from the neck of one of his trees. He wanted to let me know that delivery would be delayed that morning and I may not get my regular quantity of “the usual”. Funny things had happened to his gourds. I understood. In the village, strange spirits disguised as villagers sometimes climbed trees to help themselves to the fruit of another man’s labour. It was all part of the territory. I told him not to worry. I would accept whatever he was able to supply.

From there we go into the bush of Pius’s imagination. Tongue in cheek, crossing the postmodern image with the Tutuolan imaginary, we arrive someplace close to the now eternalized television-handed ghost of *My Life in the Bush of Ghost* fame where the television has become the cell phone:

Then it hit me like a thunderbolt!  
The familiar and the strange. The

uncanny. Try to imagine an elderly palm wine tapper atop a palm tree in the village, reaching for his pocket to fish out his blackberry in order to discuss the laws of supply and demand with a customer whose father he had also served decades earlier under a totally different economy of meanings and you will understand why that event, in the summer of 2008, marked a turning point in my attempts to fashion new ways of listening to so many new things Africa seems to be saying about her historical quest for agency – a quest that has lasted the better part of the last five centuries.

The fitful leap of the “irruption into modernity” that Glissant famously described as marking the Caribbean’s entry into the Twentieth Century is reconfigured by Pius as he rewrites Benjamin’s equivalently famous phrasing describing his own continent’s entry into an age of modern technology:

The Age of Mechanical Reproduction? That’s so dinosaur now! Perhaps you will agree with me that until a blackberry joined the arsenal of tools and implements that my palm wine tapper took atop his trees every morning in Isanlu, he belonged in a habitus of tradition governed by those mytho-ritualisms of existence which has led to tensions in the arena of historical discourses and counter-discourses about Africa’s agency.

From there we are to go to the unimaginable digital age where the tapper, now able to represent himself perfectly well with a click of his Blackberry might simply turn the phone around and take a picture of himself atop the tree, at the moment his young client

receives the call informing him his favored consumer commodity is not in stock; the proof would be that he has the photos to show this. The unhinged imagination of Tutuola now grafts itself onto Pius’s rambling cogitations where he wanders over colonial and anti-colonial notions of agency, the inadequacies of formulations about “speaking for” that have run dry in this new coeval age of blackberry self-representation. Even before the slaughter of the cock at dawn, Pius’s disturbed sleep turns nightmarish:

From the top of his palm tree, my palmwine tapper was articulating his own agency and self-representing in ways that are miles ahead of the imaginaries which underwrite my work as a writer and critic. That, I posit, is the problem of African art in the current age of social media and MAC, my acronym for mutually assured communication. The fact that he phoned me from the top of a tree in the bush rattled and unsettled me. What if, God forbid, my Baba Elemu had also recorded videos of himself at work and posted it on youtube as these new possibilities of agency now afford him? What if he tweets his conversation with me from the top of that tree? What if he makes a photo of himself at work the cover of a Facebook page dedicated to tapping? What if... questions, questions, questions.

Here Pius has definitively entered into Wainaina’s madness of *kimay*, first with the child’s bewilderment at the cacophony of incomprehensible tongues, to the later gestures toward an agency defined outside the scope of national languages. The global tongue of the tweet, the youtube video, the digitally



altered image, bring together the repackaged world of *benga* with the viral possibilities of a Kony 2012 video.

It is almost impossible to write now about world literature and globalized flows of communication without lapsing into the parody of texting—a babble that communicates not a fatigue with the familiar tropes of theory, half-forgotten with each passing year, but the technology of half-lives burning out quickly as the dissertation advisers seek desperately to keep up with their latest apps. There is no reason whatsoever for this emergent modernist age, clearly one where the threshold of post-globalization has been reached, not to deploy that same set of tropes as we might encounter in any ordinary manga or anime. The spray cans are out, graffiti has supplanted classical art in the latest doctoral research, and there is the newest apple has appropriated the old garden.

The postcolonial? Oh, yes, I remember it.

So, in answer to the question, do we still have postcolonialism in an age of post-globalization, I turn to Pius's latest essay, one he wrote about the division between the worlds of humor in the west and in Africa. Appropriately enough, the essay is titled "*Ode to the Bottle—For Ken Harrow Who Laughed*"

As in his other blog-site essays Pius begins with an anecdote. This one concerns pissing. Here he provides a recap of the joke:

A policeman arrests a guy for urinating in a place displaying the commonplace "Do Not Urinate Here" sign in Nigeria. The cop fines the offender five hundred naira. The

guy brings out one thousand naira and asks for his change. Says the policeman to the offender: "urinate again. I no get change." I wrote "The ABC of a Nigerian Joke" to explore the postcolonial cultural locatedness of this and other jokes. I made the case that humour is the most difficult thing to translate; it's very untranslatability making it one of the most reliable ways of gauging cultural integration in immigrant and diasporic communities.

But as Pius enters into the convoluted spaces that separate the postcolonial world, and its inimitable powers to laugh at the powers that devastate it, he finds himself moving to the edges of that spatialized division, wondering how a figure like Ken Harrow, a stand-in for the author of this essay, might have not understood the humor of a world he purported to have occupied since ages dating back to the period of antiquity in its national liberationist époque:

Something would be seriously wrong, I thought further, if Ken Harrow, a vieux routier of Africa, encountered an African proverb and didn't find it funny. After all, he got to Africa before me and has never really left. I thought he had forgotten his own African insiderhood, earned over decades of meticulous and thorough scholarly labour in the cultural vineyards of the continent. Ken, it should be obvious to you why you laughed, why you found that joke funny, I thought, as I made a mental note of waiting for an inspired moment to pen a follow-up essay – this essay – in his honour.

To consecrate the dedication of the essay, Pius sought the precise location of difference that would enable the crossing of one gene of humour to another to be



enabled. However, like Eshu, he discovered that his centre was precisely neither here nor there, there being, perhaps, nothing to enable an objective global consciousness to deploy a GPS signal. Instead, global subjectivity, placed within the local simultaneously with the macroworld of indefinite space, came to inform his discovery, one as old as Walcott. Pius's bedbug, the little critter that bites the ass of power, where humour can be located:

Beyond the earned cultural insiderhood which would open up Nigerian, nay African humour to an Africanist vieux routier like Ken, making him laugh at the joke about a Nigerian policeman and the politics of "change collection" in the postcolonial atmospherics of the checkpoint, there are contact zones and meeting points of the collectively human which, in hindsight, my initial essay, focused on cultural particulars, does not adequately address. As culturally hermetic as humour is, such sites, zones, and spaces of the universally human offer many opportunities for her to cross borders without passport and visa requirements.

And it is there, in that space above the ground, in the palm tree where the tapper is working in early dawn, at the crossroads where Soyinka finds the traveller, like the cock, impaled; at the conjuncture of cell phone and palmwine that the figure appears to our essayist. For Walcott it was the bedbug, of course, fitting for the satires of Martial, Juvenal, and Pope, whom he invokes in his "The Spoiler's Return." Pius's bedbug, the little critter that bites the ass of power, is the bottle. Spirits of inebriation spurt forth as every conceivable trope of the bottle is invoked, from Tom Paxton (Bottle of wine, fruit of the vine/ When you gonna let me get sober), to Kollington Ayinla:

A f'owo mu oti ki ku s'ode  
Gere gere, ng o dele mi o

(He who pays for his own booze  
Is not condemned to the outdoors  
Somehow, I'll stagger drunkenly  
all the way home).

Walcott's impersonation of the postcolonial critique is grounded in the eloquence of humor that laughs at what Mbembe would call the autocrat and his minions, the ones with dark glasses and shark fin suits. The poet clears his ground, proclaiming his high post as ruling wit: "So crown and mitre me Bedbug the First—/ the gift of mockery with which I'm cursed/ is just an insect biting Fame behind,/ a vermin swimming in a glass of wine,/ that, dipped out with a finger, bound to bite/ its saving host, ungrateful parasite..."

The answer to the question of the location of the postcolonial, somewhere between the poor slob caught urinating by the policeman, and the butt crack of power where the bug chooses to bite at power's pretensions, can only be in these far-ranging discourses of Wainaina and Adesanmi for whom there are no more stringent contingencies of agency or authenticity. If we can use their figures of *kimay* and the bottle, we can say that postcolonialism has been preloaded into the insider/outsider spaces of African postglobal writing. It permits itself to range, like the bottle, over all the registers from which humor can be heard—at least if one permits oneself a glass or two. Here is how Pius ends his satire, citing Elizabeth Renzetti who writes of drunkenness in Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper:

On a given night, you might be  
bladdered, legless, paralytic or

rotten with drink...I thought I'd heard them all until British Home Secretary Theresa May used the phrase "preloaded" on Friday to announce her government's war on binge drinking. Preloading refers to the act of getting hammered before you go out to get hammered – that is stocking up on cheap booze from the grocery store in order to be good and wobbly by the time you hit the bars."

Pius then returns to his intermediary spaces rented to global postcolonial inhabitants:

Now, why am I in stitches reading Renzetti's description of the English? The Canadian is making this Nigerian laugh by describing the English in registers that are brokered by the universal signifyin' of the bottle. If she makes me laugh, I am sure she is immensely capable of making Ken Harrow, the American, laugh with precisely the same registers. American, Canadian, French, English, Nigerian: the bottle speaks only one language but we can all understand it in our respective languages. The bottle is not Babel. She is Pentecost. We all hear her speak in our respective languages.

Of course I would let Wainaina give us the last word on that host of postcolonial global languages: not Babel or Pentecost, but *kimay*, the one Wainaina identifies with a phantom limb.

## Notes

[i] In his initial evocation of nyatiti music, as a child he played on the rhyming between "nyatiti" and "titties." The child's distance and Asberger-like reactions to stress or

nervous overload is reflected in his hyper-wordplay and association of indigenous terms and sounds as painful. Kimay and nyatiti exemplify this: When the radio announces, "A *nyatiti* is a traditional Luo instrument," the children respond with "Matiti. Ciru giggles. I giggle. Titi Titties" (24).

[iii] As we can see, when we compare his use of the term at the outset of the memoir, it is associated with the chaotic, almost autistic, subject he identifies as his earlier self.

When he has arrived to his successful state as writer, this attitude toward national cultures has changed:

When the national day of mourning Kenyatta comes, he learns to riff on *kimay*:

In school we were taught that all music comes from eight sounds: do, re, mi, fa sol, la ti do—but what those people are singing and playing cannot fit those sounds. Gibberish. Kenyatta is dead. Those red blowtorch eyes in the dining room pulling together all those fathered *harambee* sounds of people in the many costumes of Kenya, singing and dancing in no choir, many unrelated sounds and languages and styles and costumes, and facial expressions.

They have nothing to do with each other.

This is my new word, my secret. *Ki-may*. *Ki. Maay*. I let my jaw fall slack, with the second syllable, like a cartoon man with a cash register jaw. *Ki-maaay....*" (25).

... *Kimay* is the talking jazz trumpet: sneering, skewing sounds, squeaks and strains, heavy sweat, and giant puffed up cheeks, hot and sweating; bursting to say something, and then not saying anything at all; the hemming and hawing clarinet. *Kimay* is yodeling Gikuyu women, ...

... *Ki-may* is any language that I cannot speak, but I hear every day in Nakuru..." (25)

[iii] In another riff on *kimay* and Kenyan identity, Wainaina writes:

“Urban Kenya is a split personality: authority, trajectory, international citizen in English; national brother in Kiswahili; and content villager or nostalgic urbanite in our mother tongues. It seems so clear to me here and now, after South Africa, which is so different. There, there is a political battle to resolve embattled selves. Every language fights for space in all politics. In this part of town, all three Kenyas live: city people who work in English making their way home; the village and its produce and languages on the streets; and the crowds and crowds of

people being gentle to each other in Kiswahili. Kiswahili is where we meet each other with brotherhood.

It is an aspect of Kenya I am always acutely aware of—and crave, because I don’t have it all. My third language, Gikuyu, is nearly non-existent; I can’t speak it. It is a phantom limb, *kimay*...” (125) □

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\*For Pius Adesanmi: *Do We Still Have Postcolonialism?* was first published on [www.xokigbo.wordpress.com](http://www.xokigbo.wordpress.com).

*Journey through Southern  
and Eastern Africa*  
Dillon Marsh



Gisenyi,  
Rwanda





Stone Town,  
Zanzibar





Volcanic Rock  
Goma, DRC



Illala Ferry  
Malawi





Tazara Train  
Tanzania



Kampala, Uganda



## *Guilt Trip*

Sylva Nze Ifedigbo

You are eager to get back to your newspaper, to be left alone in your own world where you have memories, not mere wicked mortals to worry about.

Travelling home to Agulu has always been something you look forward to. You've always felt lonely in Lagos, this strange big city where everybody is in a hurry. You love Agulu, not just because it is your home, but because of the memories that it brings. It is those memories that usually draw you like water to a thirsty man, adding extra spring in your steps as you walk to buy your ticket at the bus station counter. They make you smile and wave greetings to other passengers whom you not know. They make you hum mutilated tunes of nursery rhymes you used to sing at *Ntakara* School, as the bus tore through the rain forest, eastwards.

It is those memories that haunt you today. They gnaw at your thought, those memories, eating you up by the bits and you wonder again if you should make the trip.

The lady at the ticket counter is familiar. You know her name, Ifeoma; pretty and tall, just the way you like your women. The last time you travelled to Agulu, which was two months ago at Christmas, you had flirted with her. The crowd at the bus station, families eager to wake up in their villages on Christmas morning, had been too much. You had arrived late and met a sea of heads. Your ticket number showed that you were not likely to make the trip that day, but you hung around, chatting with Ifeoma at the counter and making her laugh out loud, her eyes glassy with tears. You learned that she was from Obodo Ukwu, a town through which the bus to Agulu would pass. She wasn't going home because

she had to sell tickets to other travelers. You promised to bring her *ube* and *udala* from the village though you never did. She enjoyed your company that day and showed it by re-writing your ticket and giving you a seat on the next bus.

Today she smiles at you but you make like you don't know her, like her smile nauseates you. You see the shock in her eyes. You recognize it. They are yours, the kind that had enveloped you when the text message first arrived your phone. You were sitting before the mirror, just out of the shower, watching as water rolled down your body from your hair and disappeared just before it reached your navel. Your phone was on the dressing table and you had reached for it as soon as you heard the beep, your face melting into a smile. You were sure it was Nwanneka, the lady you met the week before at the bank, texting to inform you she was now on her way to your house. But the smile quickly disappeared, like it just did from Ifeoma's face, as you read the message. You didn't only feel, you saw the shock as you looked at yourself in the mirror.

The bus is already steaming, waiting for the last passengers to board. As you approach it, you feel like walking back and apologizing to Ifeoma. But as you climb into the bus, you realise you don't know what to say to her, and for the first time it dawns on you that you still don't know what to say.

You had re-read that text message a million times that Saturday afternoon in front of your mirror, and for many days to follow. The day that promised to be great with the new girl, Nwanneka visiting, suddenly took a bad turn. The tears had gathered in your eyes, but you could not weep them. You did not weep them until Nwanneka arrived, noticing the shadow the news had cast over you, and began to ask what was wrong.

"Nothing." You replied, feigning a smile, determined to handle it like a man. Men don't shed tears, your father always said, and especially, not before a woman.

"But you don't look okay to me." She had insisted, coming closer to you, her fragrance filling your lungs, her soft voice weakening the wedge of manliness around your heart.

"Come on, tell me what is wrong? Did somebody die?"

It must have been the word *somebody* that did it. You couldn't reconcile yourself with its anonymity. It wasn't just somebody or anybody that died. The world itself just died. For Ibeabuchukwu was not just somebody. He was the world to you, friend, brother, and everything else that mattered. So you let the cloud that had gathered in your eyes melt and rain down your cheeks like the water trapped in your hair after a bath. You let them flow. You even sobbed, hiding your face in Nwanneka's palms and staccato breathing like a mating dog. Her words in your ears encouraged you to let it all out, but it was not her words that motivated you. It was something else. It was your thought that the tears could wash off the guilt. So you shed gallons, soaking her blouse and hurting your eyes.

A hand luggage is all you have, so you step into the bus walking past the touts, who are placing bulky luggages into the luggage trunk for a fee. As you walk the aisle of the big Mercedes Benz bus which everyone calls Marcopolo, you run your eye over the top corner of the window area in search of your seat number. The number on your ticket is forty-five. You know odd numbers are the window seats. You love sitting by the window when travelling to Agulu. You like looking out as the earth sped by from the window, inching you closer and closer to the town of your birth, where your birth bag was buried. You like



seeing the country-side, the style of houses and the dressing of the people. You like seeing children in the villages you pass through, playing with their hands in the sand, and kicking up puffs of dust as they play football with their bare feet. It always brings back those fond memories that make you hum.

You usually throw a tantrum if you find any passenger sitting in your precious window seat.

But today you don't want to remember, so you say nothing when you find a fat buttock on your seat. You can't see her face because she has her head out of the window haggling with a hawker you also can't see. You squeeze your hand luggage into the compartment overhead, grumbling silently why people could not arrange their boxes properly, before sinking into seat forty four and unfolding the newspaper you had bought from the vendor with the dirty Super Eagles face cap outside the bus station.

"My son, sorry o," the owner of the fat buttock says a few minutes later. "I was just buying something."

You turn to see a face that must have been beautiful once. You place her age between forty and forty five, but you quickly change your mind when you notice the many strands of grey hair poking out of her loose head tie. She should be up to fifty, you tell yourself. You are trying to justify her calling you her son.

You have a personal aversion for women who like being called Mummy and those who think it okay to commandeer everyone they meet as their son. You have met a lot of them: from the women at the NYSC office during your National Youth Service, who would not sign your monthly clearance form except you called them *mummy-mummy* to your current boss at the office. You recall that when you went to ask her for the permission to make this sudden

trip, your every sentence had been punctuated with *mummy*, and when she finally approved the application, you had left her office feeling like you needed to brush your mouth.

"It's okay, madam." you reply, turning your face back to the newspaper and praying she got your *I-shouldn't-be-disturbed* look, hoping she understands that you have no intention of crossing to that seat, your real seat.

She doesn't. She begins to speak again, something about being through with what she was buying, and asking that you possess your own seat. You don't want to hear it, and just as you want to reply, your phone rings. You reach for it and make an *excuse me* face at the woman.

It is Nwanneka. She is calling to know if you have left. She sounds very concerned like she did that very first day, when you had let the tears flood her palms and blouse. You had felt a little better in her presence, such that, when she later asked to know what had happened, after she had used her fingers to clean off the lingering lines of tears off your face, and placed your head on her laps, you had felt indebted to her.

"I can understand why you feel guilty," she had said, patting you slightly on the shoulder after you had told her the story. "It is natural to feel guilty for not being there for a loved one, and now that he is gone, you begin to feel like you should have done more. It's natural. I understand. Nobody can blame you. Just pull yourself together and go for the burial. That is the last respect you should pay him, and when you are there, talk to him so that you can free your conscience and be at peace."

You sure knew you had a lot of talking to do, but you were not sure you had the right words. It gave you the chills for there was more than what Nwanneka knew. You had left out a bit. The very bit



that made you feel guilty. The very bit you don't want to remember. The bit sitting by the window was sure to remind you of.

You return the phone to your breast pocket after the call and notice that the big woman beside you has her head bent over. She is murmuring, her clenched fist punching the space in front of her. You heave a sigh of relief and go back to your newspaper. You think of praying too, but you are too shy to make the sign of the cross. So you adjust your frame on the seat and flip open the newspaper.

You must have travelled for close to two hours in silence when the woman suddenly spoke to you.

"The rains must be heavy now in the East, right?" she asks, her fat neck reminding you of Agulu sacred pythons.

You make a sound in your throat that means *yes*. You remember it was already raining in December when you last visited at Christmas.

"It means it is *udala* time," she says in Igbo, smiling like a toddler at the sight of ice cream.

You smile back, suddenly tasting the pink fruit in your mouth, and having a desire to smack your lips.

"This is the time to get real ripe *udala*, the ones brought down the tree by the rains not those unripe rubbish they sell in Lagos." The woman says in Igbo.

You nod in agreement and the memories come flooding back. It was usually you, Ibeabuchukwu, and Okezie that always went out to pick *udala* very early in the mornings during raining seasons. The harvest was usually greater after windy nights. No one owned an *udala* tree in Agulu, even if the tree stood right in front of your compound. So all the children had to wake up early and rush out to be the first to make the rounds to all the *udala* trees in the village. But the picking had to be done when the bright rays of the sun were already visible

from the east. It was said that spirits met and danced at the foot of *udala* trees at night, and anyone who went to pick *udala* before sunrise was made blind by the spirits so that he would never be able to describe what he saw.

You remember how the three of you, cousins, used to set out early at dawn daily, armed with baskets and hope. Sometimes, you were the first party to arrive at an *udala* tree. Sometimes, you met other children who arrived earlier, and had picked the better fruits. They teased you for oversleeping and ran off in the direction of the next *udala* tree.

You remember some days when your basket was still empty after the rounds, and how strong the temptation was to climb up the tree and harvest fruits yourself. But you were always scared of the wrath of the gods, as it was a taboo in Agulu to climb an *udala* tree. On such days you consoled each other as you trekked back home by singing the nursery rhymes you were taught in the *Ntakara* School, the empty baskets balanced on your heads. Your favourite rhyme was:

*There raa two litu black birds sitting on a wall:*

*Nwannem Peter, nwanne Paul.*

*Fly away Peter, fly away Paul.*

*Come back two litu black birds and sitting on a wall.*

It was many years before you understood the right wording of the poem. But you still preferred the mutilated version, the version you hummed while looking out the window. You don't want to remember, so you shrug yourself out of the thought and flip to the next page of the newspaper hoping to find something to distract you.

"It's been a long time since I went home." the woman says again, keen on



making a conversation. “Almost ten years now.”

“Ten years?” you ask in shock, “Why?”

“Since those wicked people killed my husband, I have decided to go out of their way. Very wicked people. I decided to quietly raise my children in Lagos before they will kill us all too.”

“So you mean for ten years you have not set foot in your village?”

“Yes. I didn’t want those wicked people to see me or my children.”

The woman’s Igbo sounds musical to the ear, and the ease with which she switched from English to Igbo fascinates you. You could guess she was not from Anambra. Nobody from Anambra, your home state, spoke Igbo like that, with the musical intonation. You suspected Imo State. You recall you once heard of a place in Imo where the people still ate human flesh and drank water from human skulls. You wonder if she was from there, if the place was not fiction.

“So you suspect that your husband was killed?” You ask in Igbo, disappointed that yours didn’t sound as sweet.

“I am not suspecting, I know.” the woman responds swiftly, almost as if rebuking you for doubting her claims.

Before you can say anything she adds, “They killed him with their juju. He had just started the foundation of a storey building, and all those witches who are never interested in progress killed him. They gave him *ekoafo* in his food, and he died vomiting blood.”

You shake your head in disgust. You are tempted to ask her the name of her village. But you ask instead why she was now travelling home.

“My daughter is getting married,” she replies, her face melting into a smile. “My in-laws are coming to pay her bride price, and I am going home to see her uncles before they would say I married

off their daughter without informing them.”

“Wow, congratulations,” you beam your best smile. “That’s good news, surely.”

“Yes, it is, my son. I just hope those wicked people don’t wake up to their games. I have already covered myself and my family with the precious blood of the Lamb, and I know that all weapons fashioned against us shall not prosper.”

You remember how vigorously you had seen her pray earlier, her eyes tightly shut, her fist punching the air. You imagine her calling down protection from heaven in the privacy of her room before embarking on the trip. You also imagine her going for days without food, and anointing every part of body religiously before bed. You don’t envy the *wicked people* she is talking about.

You are eager to get back to your newspaper, to be left alone in your own world where you have memories, not mere wicked mortals to worry about. You wish she would just get interested in the *Nollywood* movie being played on the bus coach television. Women love *Nollywood* movies, you think. Your boss has her office television perpetually tuned to Africa Magic, except when there was some real big international news like the attack on the World Trade Center, and recently the earth quake in Haiti. Then she would alternate between BBC and CNN.

“So, why are you travelling?” she asks clearly not interested in the movie, clearly not eager to leave you to your world.

“You don’t seem like one of these Onitsha merchants, if not I would have said you were going on business, and it’s such a strange time to be visiting home without a cause, I mean Christmas was just two months ago.”

You giggle before you answer. You resolve to twist your tongue enough to make your Igbo come out like hers.

“Yes, I am not a business man. I am going home for something.”

“Hope it is not something bad o. I hope it is not a funeral?” the woman’s face suddenly looks like the cloud heavy with rain. “The number of deaths in the village these days is really alarming. Virtually, every week my sister in the village calls to tell me that another person has died. All those wicked people, they will never rest. Enemies of progress.”

Yes, it is a funeral you are going for, you find yourself thinking to yourself, but not the type caused by wicked people. Instead, it is one you feel you caused. One that has reawakened an eighteen-year-old guilt in you. One that ropes one in harmony with the *wicked people* in the village that kill people for no reason. □

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Complete version of the story “Guilt Trip” is published in the collection *The Funeral Did Not End* (DADA Books 2012). This excerpt has been reproduced with the author’s permission.

# *The Real Tragedy in Being African*

Miriam Jerotich

The real tragedy lies in failing to find a way to live with the label, in failing to reconcile our passions and our anger.

While growing up in Kenya, I never thought of myself as African. Perhaps it rested at the back of my mind, because I knew I lived in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya - a country in the Eastern region of the African continent. I never thought of myself as Kenyan, because I did not recognize a tangible Kenyan culture, and what I was later told to be “Kenyan” appeared to me as the norm. We cooked *pilau* for special occasions; we made fun of stereotypes because we liked to laugh. Some of us gave *kitu kidogo* (bribes), and many of us complained about greedy politicians. My normal life never constituted a culture, because it was what we always did, it was our norm. I became Kenyan when I met Tanzanians and Ugandans, when it became necessary to imagine my existence around theirs. I became Kenyan when no one knew where my rural home was, when it was easier to say I came from the capital. I became Kenyan when I screamed for joy with other Kenyans, because we had the best marathon runners in the world. “That should make you proud to be Kenyan,” I was told. There and then, I learnt to be Kenyan. The Kenyan me became African in America. I became African when my hosts’ cries about homesickness seemed trivial for one who had travelled thousands of miles to get education. I became African when I went for

conferences, when we were charged to go “back home”, to stop being part of the “brain drain”, to be part of the “new generation” that would make Africa the next stop for investors. I became African when the disgustingly usual happened, when Africa equaled to disease and corruption and war and hunger.

And eventually, I began hating this “African”, because it meant condensing all Africa into one, and my Kenyan identity was never acknowledged. *Ignorance would think that Africa is a country with Mandela as president.* I hated it more when I was only known as the Kenyan woman on campus, because that was all they would ever see me as: the dark-skinned lady from the poster-child country of development agents and scholars. I hated that being African was a burden to carry, a sticky label that read: “You were colonized. You are not good enough. Let me help you, sister.” I hated that other Africans expected me to revolutionize, to liberate my mind and go back to the traditions of our ancestors, “the way things used to be”. I did not understand the fascination with dropping all Western names. *I like my name just as it is, because it reflects the complexity of my world.* Some embrace being African, because reclaiming a burdened identity expels its power over you, making you the agent of your own fate. Some reject being African,

and seek the aboriginal, the identity untainted by past and present colonizing processes. And still, some ignore being African, and never discover that being so comes with a price. Yet for all of us, the burden of being African affects our history, and will affect the future of those who come after us.

But the tragedy isn’t in the burdened identity that makes many think of us only as African or Kenyan or Nigerian or (insert ethnic group). Neither does it lie in the failed attempts we make when we challenge the status quo, nor when we question why we are monolithic figurines of the Western world. The real tragedy lies in failing to find a way to live with the label, in failing to reconcile our passions and our anger. More importantly, it lies in failing to know that we can be more than our assigned labels. We belong to an infinite cosmos. We can be more than ‘African’. We can make the fleeting moments count, choosing to be whatever we wish to in the midst of myriad voices telling us what identity to embody. And when we learn how to live beyond fractured identities, we will know a full life; the kind that surges forth, unhurt and uncompromised by anyone, the kind that’s more than just being African. □



## *Thirteen*

Tosin Akingbulu

She points to my chest, as something lights up her eyes. I look at it. I see the emblem of an aircraft.

The bus grinds to a halt at Oshodi to pick up passengers. There is a crowd of commuters at the bus stop. I have been standing in line on a long queue to pay for BRT bus tickets. The rate at which this crowd multiplies, I know I would only end up being cramped inside, with smelly bodies hanging onto the railings, pressed against me, as if I was in a molue.

The driver of the bus honks twice. Those who weren't standing in line begin to appear, claiming positions, causing a ruckus. The door is barely open before people begin to struggle to force their way through. As I join in the battle to climb aboard, I hang my bag on my neck as a shield to wade off inevitable blows to my midriff from elbowing commuters and more importantly, to save my bag from crafty pickpockets. After much struggle, I manage to get on the bus and find just one empty seat - the lone seat behind the door. As I sit, I place my hand over my left ear and feel nothing where my earring is supposed to be—a consequence of the 5pm rush hour, like Lagosians call it; in truth, the opposite never exists in Oshodi! At all times, there is a throng of people milling around the bus stop, scurrying along to wherever it is they are going; the rat race never ends.

I see a pregnant woman, well, more like a girl supported by an older woman at the door. She is having difficulty ascending the steps.

— Halima, sauri! Sauri! I can hear the strain in the older woman's voice.

– Hajiya, ---

No one lends a helping hand. People only stare and then look away again. I'm not surprised, every man with his own problems - an unspoken mantra in the metropolis.

The pregnant girl, Halima and her companion join the others that are standing along the aisle, holding the railings for support. I do not take my eyes off the girl. I am struck by what I see. The girl, about 5 feet tall, has a bulging abdomen. The blue satin robe she is wearing reaches past her ankles and seems to emphasize the protrusion. It looks like she would buckle under its weight. She makes to bend, but the older woman steadies her. She holds the railings with her left hand, and places the right under her abdomen, as if to support it. I want to tell her to take my seat but my feet ache after standing long hours on the queue. I cannot begin to imagine the discomfort she must be going through.

The stench of urine permeates the air. It seems to be emanating from the pregnant girl, and as she is standing near me, it would be rude to put my hands over my nose to block it out. So I turn to the window. The dense mixture of exhaust fumes and putrid air hits me full in the face and I wonder which is better.

Outside the bus there is action. Two danfo buses collided and the expected angry chit-chat is in session. Soon a LASTMA official would join in and they would be made to part with all the money they have managed to accrue today. Since the ban of okadas, the notoreity of danfo drivers alias the-new-kings-of-the-road seems to have surpassed limits.

I spot one danfo with missing side-mirrors switching lanes undecidedly. I watch in bewilderment as the danfo driver tries to manoeuvre his way. Ahead is a long row of stationary vehicles. I wonder where he could be rushing to when it is obvious we are all going to spend some quality time in this holdup. Sometimes in Lagos, trying to understand the logic behind people's actions gives you a headache.

The vehicles in front begin to move, and just as our driver hits the accelerator, the missing-side-mirror bus, in one swift motion, swerves into our lane, right in front of our bus. The driver is quick to slam the brake, but as he does, the bus lurches forward before coming to a halt. The pregnant girl spirals forward and I am afraid she will hit the windscreen. She lands on her butt and I can see the tears beginning to gather at the corner of her eyes. I cannot take it anymore. I take her hand and pull her up, and seat her in my place. I take her position and stand beside her. In gratitude, her companion puts both hands together, holding them up in front of her face. I take a closer look at the girl. She has her hair woven in cornrows. She has small breasts, like her hands and feet. I ask how old she is.

– Thirteen.

Thirteen. At that age, I was still learning how to stick a pad to my underwear.

– Your name is Halima?

She nods.

– Do you want water?

– Yes. Thank you, ma.

Through the window, a bottle of water is purchased by me from a street hawker

and given to her. She hesitates, and then in three long swigs, empties the bottle. From the corner of my eye, I see Halima's companion staring at her, concern spreading over her face.

The bus halts at Mangoro bus stop and a passenger alights. Halima's companion is fortunate to get the vacant seat. Standing beside Halima, without the older woman breathing down my neck, I feel at ease to continue the conversation.

– Why don't you go to antenatal clinic near your home?

– I don't go to antenatal. Alhaji said I should not go.

– Who is Alhaji?

– My husband.

I shudder. This girl, who is barely a teenager, has a husband. Quite similar to the cases I studied in Sociology class.

– Why don't you tell your mother to take you? I look in the direction of the older woman.

– Hajiya Salatu. She is not my mother. She is my ... my husband's first wife.

My lower jaw drops open. I think it quite shocking that some parents would do this, marry a child off to a much older man - mostly due to poverty, where the only resource the parent has is the girl child as their only hope of attaining much needed wealth.

– You speak fluent English. Did you go to school?

– Yes, I left school in JSS3. That was when my scholarship ended.

– Did you like school?

– Yes.

– What do you want to become?

She points to my chest, as something lights up her eyes. I look at it. I see the emblem of an aircraft.

– I want to be a pilot. But then, her eyes fall, as if, in defeat.

– You would have continued school if your parents had the money?

She laughs. I am relieved to see her change of expression even if it isn't entirely cheerful.

– My parents have the money. They are not poor. They gave me to Alhaji because only an older man can curb my excesses. That was the year after I became class president and I joined the debate team in school.

I am confused and I tell her this.

– My father thought that if I continued that way, my eyes would open to the ways of the world and I could compromise. Where I come from, a girl is married off early to ensure her virtue remains intact. If not, she can bring shame to her family.

I want to express my disgust and rebuke someone, maybe her father, or Alhaji. But my tongue forms no words because I find that I cannot entirely blame this girl, or her husband, or her family. Their eyes have been clouded with the dust of tradition that to them, conjunctivitis is a norm and not a disease.

I am curious about her - where she is going to, why she is in Lagos and why she reeks of urine. I envisage she has VVF and doesn't even know about it. But I can see the strong will in her eyes. Perhaps she can make it through.

– You know, you don't have to stay with Alhaji. You can get help.

I retrieve my pen from my jacket's pocket and scribble my phone number on a rough sheet of paper I find. I make to press it into her palms but she seems hesitant.

– Halima, I know you are a fighter. But fighting these battles alone doesn't mean that you'd win the war.

The bus slows down at Cement bus stop. I hear Halima's companion, Hajiya Salatu call to her. As Halima gets up from the seat, after much struggle, I see that the seat is wet. I look at her backside and see the same. Hajiya Salatu sees it too and frowns. As she pulls her towards the door, I call to Halima.

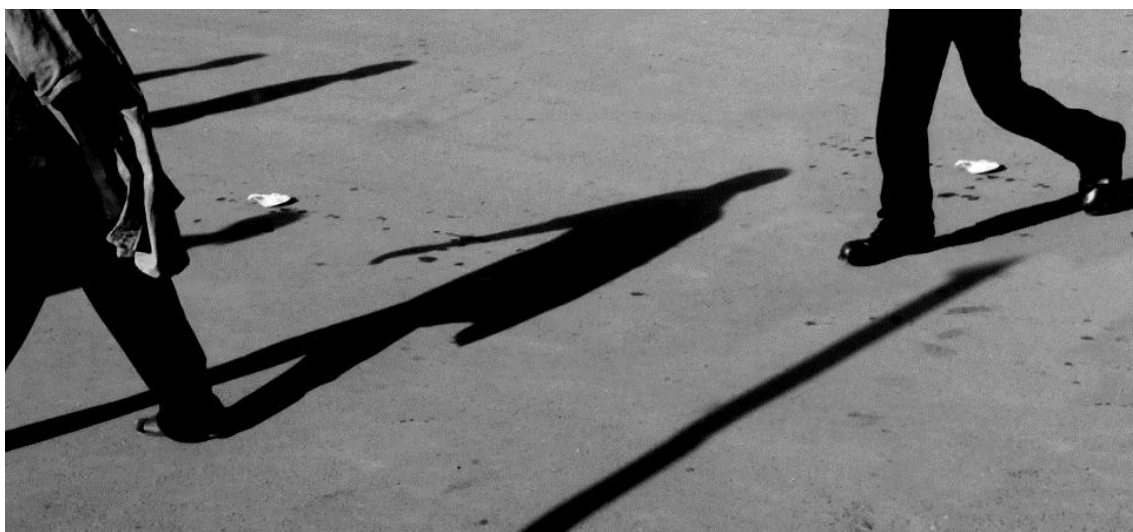
– Take my jacket. You'll need it.

Halima takes the jacket and whispers, "Na gode". As they get off the bus, I hope it covers much of her behind, but more importantly, that the emblem inspires her to seek to reach for the skies. □

*Shadows and Traffic*  
Serubiri Moses









# *The Attempted Killing* *of Faruk* Richard Ali

The water mixed with the shattered glass and started to spread around all alone. Like tears of regret. Like blood.

Fancy a durbar being held on such a hot day, Faruk thought, as he parked his car in front of Maryam's house. A small child with a rotund stomach caked in brown Bolewa dust sat on a stool outside the main gate, contentedly chewing a stick of sugarcane thrice his length. The Bazza house was built in the traditional Bolewa fashion, like Hajia Hauwa's. It was a fortress, save for two doors—a main gate usually locked until each time Abdulkadir Bazza drove through, and a smaller door that led into a small waiting room that led into the *zaure* which was the general reception area. The main gate was open and he saw the single story building on the other side, where Abdulkadir Bazza lived together with Maryam, his latest wife, and their young children. The rooms of other relatives formed a square around the courtyard. Abdulkadir Bazza sat watching over his car being washed—he waved Faruk in.

"Greetings while you rest," Faruk greeted.

The older man had a newspaper across his laps. "Young prince, how are you today? Please sit down," Abdulkadir Bazza said, making space on the wooden bench.

"I am well, though the weather is punishing."

"Yes, it gets that way sometimes. The heat will ease up soon though, watch and see."

"It's all *alhamdulillah*."

Maryam's father nodded. "You have come to take my daughter to the durbar?"

"Yes, with your gracious permission."

"You have my permission," Mallam Bazza said, suddenly getting excited and putting on his glasses. He excused himself and cursed at the boy washing the car, a child of about twelve, for having missed a spot. "Maybe he thought because I was talking to you I wasn't paying attention? The young lazy thing! I hear you will be leaving us soon?"

"Yes, Mallam, I have to return to Jos where my home is and where my future awaits me."

"I have been told. But we are happy that you have come at all. And I know you will not forget your first home, where your father and your mother were born."

"I cannot forget Bolewa; its pulse is in my veins. I will surely return someday," Faruk replied.

Silence fell on their conversation.

Abdulkadir Bazza looked Faruk over in his mind, putting all that had happened between them in perspective. The boy was wearing a crème coloured kaftan with a red keffiyeh blanket across his shoulders but he wasn't wearing a cap. Abdulkadir Bazza knew all about his daughter's love for Faruk, in fact, Maryam had confessed it to him and told him that Faruk did not want to love her. He had admired Faruk then for not taking advantage of his daughter's infatuation. It was not in the place of a man to speak with the male friend of his favourite child, an only daughter whose heart was breaking already from such a friend's imminent departure, but Abdulkadir Bazza hoped Faruk would take leave of his daughter in a kind, proper way.

"Allah *rene*," Mallam Bazza said, in Fulfulde this time, before continuing in English, "Maryam is inside, you may go into the *zaure* and wait for her. I will be here."

But by the time Faruk and Maryam came out of the house ten minutes later, there was just the boy waxing the car. Maryam was dressed in a crème gown and had a black veil over her head; her hands had just been done with new *henna* designs, the black dye standing out against her light skin. Faruk had always been fascinated by her hands and wrists—by the subtle grace about them, slim and nimble. He always teased her about the first time he had seen her drawing water from the well—her ploy to come to see him. Now, three months later, she looked like a girl who should be happy—yet a benign bitterness was eating at her heart.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked, "Are you unwell?"

"Nothing. There's nothing wrong with me," she said, hiding her eyes away, willing herself to not ruin their last moments together with tears. Faruk's crème *dashiki* matched her outfit and she fiddled around absentmindedly with the three-cornered cap he had stuffed into the Toyota's cubby hole. She looked outside the window as they left the houses of Wuza behind and passed the stretches of untenanted land between the quarters of Bolewa on their way to the GRA where the *durbar* was to be held. They drove past children and young people dressed in finery, mostly caftans of various colours and fez caps—all on their way to the GRA Polo Ground. Maryam was caught between conflicting moods—on the one hand trying to contain her sadness that Faruk would be leaving for his woman in Jos, that though they had shared so much he still belonged to another, and on the other her desire to savour her last moments with him. He had passed up the opportunity to ride in a procession in order to see the pageant from the public stands with her. Yet, while she was dressing up for him, when she heard his



voice speaking to her father, little termites began gnawing at the bold face she had tried to put over her impossible love.

"When are you leaving?" she asked.

"The day after tomorrow."

Of course, Faruk thought. If only there was no Rahila Pam? But it was not a realistic thought, because he would not have even come to the Northeast for discovery or any other reason had Rahila not been his lover. Not even for the sake of Maryam could he imagine what would be if there was no Rahila.

Faruk knew what was going on—but he wasn't sure if it wasn't what he hoped. In his mind, Maryam Bazza was in love with him and she thought she could never love anyone else. Hers, he felt, was puppy love—but even there, he was unsure, for he knew it was not always a brother's love he felt for Maryam Bazza. Once again, *if only there was no Rahila Pam?* Faruk sighed and drummed his fingers on the steering wheel lightly. In a few months, the University would give Maryam Bazza a glimpse of life and a lesson in lifestyles—she would grow past him, she had to. Yet, sometimes his vanity wondered—would their affair not be like his mother's, and her lover the young Waziri—a long drawn out, tragic tale? He remembered one night, the night he saw her after returning from the Palace, she had said.

"Faruk, I would give my life for you if you asked. You know that?"

But he had changed the subject smoothly—he did not want such a responsibility. That night he had seen how hurt she was. He felt as if he had left a puppy out in the rain and when she caught on to his changing the subject, he felt damned, as if that self same puppy had on opening the door, come in frisky, licking his shins in an indicting forgiveness. It was that night that he most wanted to take Maryam Bazza

home and make love to her—that night he wanted to curse Rahila to insignificance. But he had not; he had instead changed the subject. No, unlike his mother, there was something resilient in Maryam—he doubted there was anything else for her, except the increasing of experience.

"Are you happy?" he asked, slowing down to a sedate speed so he could envelope her hand in his right palm, squeezing it. She felt a fluffy lightness in her being. Damn you, Faruk, and your questions, she thought. Am I happy? He always asked the right questions—the sort that made everything clear, the sort she hated, for she had grown addicted to the delirious high of desire. If only I didn't love him, she thought, and he did not love someone else.

"I'm happy that we have loved each other these last three months. I am a woman and that is why I am upset you are leaving, but I am not sad. Yes, Faruk, I am happy."

"That's the most important thing in the world. *When we are happy, we are always good, but when we are good, we are not always happy.*"

"Wilde," she said. He loved Oscar Wilde and always quoted him.

"Yes. To be happy is the most important thing in the whole world, and even if I have to compensate the happiness I feel in my heart for your love, even if I were to pay the price of the most agonizing torture for it, I will always treasure it in my heart. I have been happy with you, Maryam."

Maryam nodded, holding her tears back. He had been very happy with her, but he had not, could not say, that he had loved her—because he knew that to say so and leave her would make her mad. Oh Allah! What has this boy done to me? But there in the car, at that moment so close to tears, with thoughts





of sad nuances flitting about her mind, she regained her joy—in defiance against the months of pain she knew already would come.

“All right?” he asked, winking, ignorant of her thoughts.

“Alright,” she responded, to their private joke.

Faruk smiled and stepped on the accelerator.

Just before he took a turn unto the GRA road, he caught a black jeep in his rear-view mirror. A sudden thrill of foreboding ran through him—he had noticed that car twice now. Was it trailing him? He did not want to alarm Maryam but his mind became unsettled. The SUV took a different turn and Faruk heaved a little sigh. Maybe he was imagining things? Yet, he remained uncomfortable.

It was approaching ten a.m. by the time they got into the courtyard of Sidi’s house and a light breeze had begun to blow. The car would be safe there. The sun, typical of Bolewa, had repented of its earlier anger. He parked the car beneath a tree in the yard and opened the door for Maryam to get down, playing the last performance of a knight-courtier in her honour. Together, they mingled with the crowd and headed for the Polo Field, swimming in the excited human swarm of their native land.

The enclosed field filled up by the minute, and the noise corresponded with the crowd present, but they were not yet so late that they could not find their way. The Emir’s security officer, Hassan Hussein, had made arrangements for Faruk to stay on the balcony of his aunt’s house, which gave a vantage to the Polo field. They were just in time, barely getting through the balcony’s sliding glass door when the air was rent with a hullabaloo. They both rushed to the railings to catch the action, and they caught a fine view of the people’s ecstasy on hearing the thrill of the trumpets; it

was just as if a snake had run through blades of grass, a delicate ripple of motion and emotion. It was beautiful to see, but, like blades of grass, none of the people could watch because all were drawn into the action. Even Faruk and Maryam on the balcony were drawn into the Emir’s course.

At the far end of the field, where the main gate was located, was gathered the greater mass of townspeople. A few minutes later, the first of the Emir’s forerunners arrived on a white horse, rearing wildly up and down, stopping and gallivanting, brandishing a sword rhythmically—Faruk thought the rider was shouting something. From where he stood, he was sure the rider was none other than Hassan Hussein. Faruk’s mind reverted to the black SUV that had made him uneasy—he wondered if he shouldn’t let Hassan Hussein know about that, just in case?

Already the trumpets could be heard and soon the trumpet blowers followed the wild rider, blowing with all their lungs; he imagined their cheeks swelling like hot air balloons with the effort. The musical message beneath their notes was in a language that seized all who heard it—seeming to still both breath and heartbeat, holding all the eyes looking at the *yan’kirarai* in their light coloured *babanriga*. Just when the crowd sighed, it was struck by the next spectacle. This time, it was a procession of the sons of the emir’s brothers and close relatives mounted on the finest horses Faruk had ever seen.

Maryam had fallen silent since the first notes of the *yan’ kirarai* but she pressed her body into him as she stood beside him so she could feel his heartbeat, absorbing it in her softness. Faruk, caught in the flow of the moment, felt her intention and as always, understood. He wondered if he should





not make love to her—the house was more or less deserted and no doubt Hassan Hussein had left instructions with this possibility in mind . . . But then the weather was growing steadily colder and Faruk had draped his red *keffiyeh* across his head, so he pretended she merely needed the warmth of his body so he let her lean into him— holding her across the stomach with his right arm softly, protectively. Just like a brother.

Below them the crowd waited for the Emir's arrival.

The Bolewa nobility wore gleaming white turbans with two tufted 'ears' pointing upwards on both sides of its crown—only they were allowed to wear their turbans in such a manner. All their horses were splendid, prized Arab bloodlines—most definitely from New York. Faruk well understood the rage of Umami al-Qassim's uncle when her lovers burnt down his stable: How easy it was to take the decision to banish the two rivals, unknowingly plunging Bolewa into schism and bloodshed. Each mount was dressed in finery, the princes rode serenely by, accepting with calm impassivity the acclaim of their people. Faruk realized that even if he were to spend the rest of his life in Bolewa, he would still be learning new idiosyncrasies, new paradoxes in the common and the ordinary. Where else in northern Nigeria would one find a *darbar* where non-Muslims were equal on the field with the Muslims? Only here, it seemed, at the far end of Hausaland, at the intersection of Borno and Adamawa—Bolewa had thrived beyond the division of faction. This little emirate had managed to complement the past and the present seamlessly, within what had become a country intent on fragmenting itself.

The frenzy of the crowd reached a crescendo when the Emir arrived at the

grounds mounted on a sturdy camel, preceded by twelve riders on black horses, firing very loud guns into the air: *Kboom, kboom, kboom!* At the centre of the tumult was his uncle, the Emir of Bolewa, clad in a silver-grey robe, hemmed with gold embroidery, worn over a white kaftan. He had a dazzling white turban on his head. Ramalan al-Qassim wore dark sunglasses to protect his eyes from the sun and the dust, and his right arm was raised in salute to his people, his guests. Every step of the camel, unhurried in its dignity, made its rider seem like a centre of calm amidst the tumult of the crowd. Faruk raised his arm to the Emir, who could not possibly see him, in solidarity and gratitude—for having given him the history of his mother. The Emir had given him a part of the big picture of his past.

Loud traditional *harquebuses* went off all like fire crackers. The crowd was in sheer ecstasy.

"I'm feeling very cold." Maryam said.

Faruk nodded and took his *keffiyeh* off his head and wrapped it around Maryam's shoulder. But he was shocked to see her face had grown pale.

"You are unwell? You are turning pale. What's wrong?" he asked.

Maryam wasn't feeling well, but she didn't want to say so. She did not want to miss the *darbar* but she had suddenly begun to feel faintly. Instead of saying so, Maryam shook her head to Faruk's concerns, but she pulled his *keffiyeh* tighter around her.

"I'm okay. It's just the cold, that's all."

Faruk looked confused.

"Stop looking at me as if I'm a ghost," she said, "I'm fine."

"Okay. Let me check the house if there's maybe a sweater you could wear."

Maryam did not want Faruk to leave her, but she felt him do so—she leaned on the railings.

“Could you check for some water?” she said.

Maryam did not see the assassin appear on the roof of the disused building about a hundred yards to her left. Her eyes were on the crowd, the guns going off to the screams of delight. The Emir had just got off his camel, and, amidst the blare of trumpets, was making his way to the dais with his courtiers around him.

The agreed signal from his partner, who was dressed in a kaftan at a place in the crowd that offered a good vantage of the balcony on which their target stood, beeped. The quiet assassin put the cell phone into his pocket and lifted the already assembled Dragunov rifle unto a pedestal comprising two cement bricks. He looked through the sight, picked his target and pressed the trigger—breathing out slowly. He felt the recoil of the rifle and saw Faruk fall within a second—he smiled and immediately started disassembling the rifle. It was all over in less than thirty seconds.

The crowd over whom the sniper shots had flown had not even heard a thing.

Someone mounted a small podium built beside the covered stands. He would then call out the name of the noble houses represented at the durbar, he was calling out in Hausa and it was difficult to hear him above the din of trumpets and drums. But since the order for riding out had already been decided upon, it did not affect the participant horsemen.

*“Gidan Waziri Bolewa!”*

A brief hush fell on the crowd, and those nearest to the centre of the field moved a couple of paces back. Within

seconds, a posse of men on splendid glistening horses cantered out of the ranks of cavalry. At a command, they suddenly broke into a gallop, swiftly covering the fifty yard distance at high speed before abruptly drawing rein just in front of the dais—acclaiming the Emir as their feudal lord and kinsman. It was a dusty homage. The men then dispersed in time for another noble house to ride up. The family of the late Usman was still prominent in Bolewa, judging by the number of men it had equipped: there were no fewer than twenty-five.

*“Gidan Beri beri Keffi!”*

*“Gidan Sulubarwa Katsina!”*

*“Gidan Sambo Garbossa!”*

*“Gidan Sulubarwa Zazzau!”*

*“Gidan Sarkin Sudan!”*

Each time, a company of men would charge down at full speed and abruptly draw rein where the Emir sat on an oriental carpet, surrounded by courtiers. The Emir, prayer beads draped around his fingers, acknowledged each party with a wave of his hand.

Faruk’s heart skipped a few beats when he found Maryam crumpled on the floor of the balcony.

“WAYOOOO ALLAH!” he screamed, the glass of water fell to the floor together with the sweater he had found as he ran to her, the tears falling from his eyes. The water mixed with the shattered glass and started to spread around all alone. Like tears of regret. Like blood. □



## Glossary

**Zaure** – Hausa term for a reception room to which non-family members can sit and palaver.

**Alhamdlillah** – Arabic for “Praise be to God”.

**Rene** – Fulfulde for “Be praised”; Allah be praised.

**Dashiki** – Sleeveless gown.

**Yan’kirarai** – “The people who call”, as in, traditional trumpeters (kakaki) who herald royalty.

**Babanriga** – Wide flowing gown for men.

**Keffiyeh** – A headdress/blanket used originally by Arab and Berber males.

**Gidan** – House, in the sense of dynasty, as in the House of Windsor; the names that follow are royal or princely houses in northern Nigeria.

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“The Attempted Killing of Faruk” is an excerpt from the novel *City of Memories* [available via Amazon in [print](#) and as a [Kindle Ebook](#)]. This excerpt has been reproduced with the author’s permission.



## *Touchdown* Ikeogu Oke

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Our plane descends upon Johannesburg;  
Its hard underbelly lowers onto the tarmac;  
Everywhere, a bright bulb ruptures the morning's gloom  
With spindles of its golden light.

The same light that in my country  
Still shines as empty words and emptier deeds,  
Such that our landing  
Might have been on pitch-dark grounds. □

## Contributors

**Akumbu Uche** studied Mass Communication at the University of Jos. She keeps a blog, [www.akumbuwrites.wordpress.com](http://www.akumbuwrites.wordpress.com)

**Brendan Bannon** is an American photographer based in Nairobi since 2005. He has worked for many international newspapers and a variety of International NGOs throughout east and central Africa. His work has appeared in The New York Times, New York Post, ABC, NBC, Monocle, Der Stern, Le Monde, Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, The Guardian, The Independent, Kwani, The Washington Post, Scotland on Sunday Magazine, Parade Magazine, National Public Radio. He has worked with, among others, UNEP, UNHCR, UNICEF, MSF, CARE International, Ford Foundation, Doctors Without Borders, UN High Commission for Refugees, BBC World Service Trust, Hope and Homes For Children UK, Special Olympics Romania. Bannon's work has been exhibited at UN Headquarters in New York and Nairobi.

**Brian Bwesigye's** work has appeared in the Uganda Modern Literary Digest, Short Story Day Africa, New Black Magazine, AFLA Quarterly among others. He was part of the six-member team that won the 2012 International Chain Story Challenge. His book *Fables out of Nyanja* was published by Kushinda in 2012. He manages programs at the Center for African Cultural Excellence, when he is not teaching Human Rights at Makerere University. He has recently been awarded a Fellowship in Theatre by the D&F Academy, Hamburg, Germany.

**Dami Ajayi** is a medical doctor. He combines an interest in medical science with a pursuit of literary mastery. He has been published by The Guardian, Pala-Pala Magazine, Nigeriansbiz.com and Africanwriter.com.

**Dillon Marsh** graduated from the University of Stellenbosch with a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Art. He currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. His passion for photography and travel inspires most of his work.

**Dike Chukwumerije** is the author of eight books, most recently *On My Way to Azure Shores: A Book of Poems*. Samples of his work can be found on [www.dikechukwumerije.blogspot.com](http://www.dikechukwumerije.blogspot.com)

**Donald Leungo Molosi** is recognized as one of the finest and most influential artists in Botswana. He is an official Ambassador for Brand Botswana and the youngest-ever recipient of the Khama Brilliant Spirit Award (2003), a prestigious Presidential award, for his contribution to the arts in Botswana. In that capacity he has had the privilege of being invited to perform his political one-man plays in

front of many dignitaries including Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan and Bill Clinton. Molosi's playwriting interests include the reconstruction of memory in the Postcolonial state as well as the utilization of artistic methodology for the production of theater scholarship. These themes run through his artistic work, most recent of which are *Blue, Black and White* (2010), *Today It's Me* (2011) and *MOTSWANA* (2012) - three one-man shows that have all been shown off-Broadway in New York City. In 2011, he won both the coveted Best Actor Award and the Best Solo Award off-Broadway at the United Solo Festival, the world's largest solo theater festival and the New York Times called his performance as being "inflamed with passion." His Ugandan play *Today It's Me* has since won the Robert Potter Playwriting Award from UCSB Theater Department.

Molosi earned his BA in Political Economy and Theater from Williams College in Massachusetts. He later graduated from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) with a graduate Diploma in Classical Acting and Performance. His 2010 play on the life and artistry of Ugandan musician-activist, Philly Lutaaya earned Molosi both the Ruth Scott Memorial Prize in Theater and the Florence H. Chandler Fellowship in Theater.

**Esame Bassey** is a writer and a documentary filmmaker. She lives in London with her husband and kids. She is currently working on a collection of short stories titled *When Life Hands You Lemons*.

**Francesco Poroli** is a 37 year old freelance illustrator and art director, born and based in Milan, Italy. Since 2000, he's been working for a wide range of clients including The New York Times Magazine, NBA, Wired, Glamour, Adidas and many others. He is the proud father of Riccardo and Beatrice. You can reach him here: [www.francescoporoli.it](http://www.francescoporoli.it)

Writer, poet, playwright, social entrepreneur, **Godspower Oboido** was born in Nigeria in 1988 but now lives and writes in England. His poetry has appeared in *Another Ann arbor*, *Nathaniel Turner*, *Dailymail UK* as well as other print and online journals. Godspower Oboido was a finalist in the Future Nigeria Awards 2010. His first full-length collection of poems, *Songs of a Chicken Bone* will be published in Canada in 2013.

**Hieronymus (Jeroen) Evers**, born in 1961 has worked as an art-director in movie productions for more than 20 years. In the mid 90's he took up photography and has worked as a freelance photographer for agencies, magazines and studios in The Netherlands since then.

He visited the Sahara for the first time during a trip to Morocco and Western-Sahara in 2008, starting his foundation 'water4africa.nl' at the same time. The idea was to find sponsors, not for the trip, but to raise money in order to be able to support water related projects in (Sub)Saharan countries. In collaboration with 'StopPoverty' he was able to provide several African communities with new waterpumps. The second trip to the largest



desert in the world took Jeroen to Tamanrasset through the vast sandy plains of Algeria and back through the Hoggar to places like 'In Salah' and the M'Zab valley'. It is here he took most pictures of daily life in Algeria and its people, whom he found to be proud but also warm and friendly.

**Ikeogu Oke's** poetry has been published on both sides of the Atlantic since 1988. He holds a BA in English and Literary Studies from the University of Calabar and an MA in Literature from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He has published four poetry collections: *Where I Was Born*, *Salutes without Guns*, *Song of Success and Other Poems for Children* and *In the Wings of Waiting*. In 2010, the Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer selected his *Salutes Without Guns* as one of the Books of the Year for the *Times Literary Supplement*, describing him as "a writer who finds the metaphor for what has happened and continues, evolves, not often the way we want in our lives in Africa and the world" and who "does so timelessly and tellingly, as perhaps only a poet can."

**Keguro Macharia** is a literary and cultural critic. He blogs at [gukira.wordpress.com](http://gukira.wordpress.com)

**Kenneth Harrow** is Distinguished Professor of English at Michigan State University. His work focuses on African cinema and literature, Diaspora and Postcolonial Studies. He is the author of *Thresholds of Change in African Literature* (Heinemann, 1994), *Less Than One and Double: A Feminist Reading of African Women's Writing* (Heinemann, 2002), and *Postcolonial African Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism* (Indiana U P, 2007). His latest work *Trash! A Study of African Cinema Viewed from Below*, was published by Indiana University Press in 2013. He has edited numerous collections on such topics as Islam and African literature, African cinema, and women in African literature and cinema.

**Lara Daniels** is a registered nurse whose nursing experience cuts across both critically ill patients as well as patients diagnosed with mental health disorders. When she is not working with her patients, you'll find her penning African-based romance novels. She makes her home in Texas and can be found [www.lardaniels.org](http://www.lardaniels.org).

**Mike Pflanz** is a British journalist based in Nairobi as the East, West and Central Africa Correspondent for the UK Daily Telegraph. Born in Kenya, he returned from Britain to work in Africa in 2004, and has since reported from 22 countries across the continent, including Somalia, DR Congo and Sierra Leone. Aside from in the Telegraph titles, Pflanz's work has appeared in the Christian Science Monitor, The Scotsman, The Times, Reader's Digest, ArtVoice, The Boston Phoenix and he appears on radio or television as a commentator on African affairs.

**Miriam Jerotich** is a writer, blogger, and researcher studying Cultural Anthropology and African Studies at Dartmouth College. Her short

stories and poems have been published in various college publications. She comes from Kenya.

**Némo Tral** is a french illustrator, who trained as an architect. Mostly working for or with architects, his personal work explores graphic fields related to architecture and landscape. The poetry of ruined and uninhabited places is his main inspiration source. Of this attraction are born several ephemeral installations in abandoned factories in Montreal, Canada. Still in the fields related to the memory of places, he is currently working on an exhibition at the V & A Museum in London: Sky Arts Ignition, Memory Palace.

Lover and drinker of wine, **Okoroafor Chibuzor** is a final year cadet officer of the Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Oron.

**Israel Okwuje** is a Nigerian writer. His work has appeared in the Kalahari Review.

**Peter Akinlabi**'s poems have been published in Sentinel Quarterly, NTLitmag, Maple Tree Literary Supplement among others. He's currently working on a collection of poems titled *A Pagan Place*. He lives and works in Ilorin.

**Pius Adesanmi** is the author of *You're not a Country, Africa*, which won the Penguin Prize for African Writing in the non-fiction category in 2010. His book, *The Wayfarer and Other Poems* won the Association of Nigerian Authors' Poetry Prize in 2001. He lives in Ottawa, Canada, where he teaches African and postcolonial literatures at Carleton University.

**Richard Ali** was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2010; he is the Editor of the Sentinel Nigeria Magazine, and Publicity Secretary [North] of the Association of Nigerian Authors. His debut novel, *City of Memories*, [available via Amazon in [print](#) and as a [Kindle Ebook](#)] deals with love and memory amidst the socio-political conflicts of northern Nigeria. He is presently working on a debut collection of poems.

**Sefi Atta** was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. She was educated there, in England and the United States. She qualified as a chartered accountant in England and as a CPA in the United States. In 2001, she graduated with MFA from Antioch University, Los Angeles. She currently lives in Meridian, Mississippi.

Sefi is the author of *Everything Good Will Come*, *Swallow* and *News from Home*. Her short stories have appeared in journals such as *Los Angeles Review*, *Mississippi Review* and *World Literature Today*. They have won prizes from the *Zoetrope Short Fiction Contest* and the *Red Hen Press Short Story Award*, and have been finalists for *Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award* and the *Caine Prize for African Literature*. In 2004, Sefi was awarded *PEN International's David TK Wong Prize*, in 2006, the *Wole Soyinka Prize for Publishing in Africa*, and in 2009, the *Noma Award for Publishing in Africa*. Also a

playwright, her radio plays have been broadcast by the BBC and her stage plays have been performed internationally. *A Bit of Difference* is her latest novel

**Serubiri Moses** is a known violinist, writer and photographer on Kampala's growing arts scene. A period in Malaysia caused him to question his individual voice; in 2010, he graduated from New York Institute of Photography and was shortlisted in the Storymoja Hay Festival Poetry Competition.

**Sylva Nze Ifedigbo** is a Fiction writer, op-ed columnist and PR practitioner. He is the author of *The Funeral Did Not End*, a collection of short stories (DADA Books, 2012). He lives in Lagos Nigeria and tweets from @nzesylva.

**Tosin Akingbulu** graduated from Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria in March, 2011. She writes short fiction and poetry and has performed her poetry at Freedom Hall, Terrakulture, Lagos. In 2012, she was a participant at the Fidelity Bank Creative Writing Workshop. She is a tutor at the Writer's Academy, Obafemi Awolowo University.

Tosin has contributed as a freelance writer to both print and online magazines and seeks to influence change by inspiring the Nigerian people through her works. In her spare time, Tosin loves to create fashion pieces.

## *Design Notes*

In designing this issue of Saraba, I paid close attention to words from Mos Def's 'Life in Marvelous Times.' When he sings 'they green grass is green...' I immediately imagined his verse was colouring a continent.

And Dillon Marsh's photo of a Malawian ferry suited my aesthetic vision for this Issue's cover because it captured the idea of trans-generational exchange. Exchange in my visual vocabulary is synonymous with Africa.

*Illa Amudi*

*Big congratulations  
to our contributors:*

**Clifton Gachugua**, winner of  
**The Sillerman Prize**

**Peter Akinlabi**,  
shortlisted for **The Brunel University  
African Poetry Prize**



Artwork Francesco Poroli for Moda24/Il Sole 24 Ore

